

ULTRA-SOFT
MUSIC

for the
M I N D
and
BRAIN

THE

7

th ISSUE

SOUND

PROJECTOR

EVERY MAN HIS OWN
MICROPROCESSOR

CHANGE YOUR
SURROUNDINGS

COMPUTER MUSIC
VERY SPECIAL
NOTHING
MUSIC



INTERVIEWS ➔

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Van Dyke

PARKS

● MM Year 2wo Thousand ●



**NOCTURNAL
EMISSIONS**

PEOPLE LIKE US

YOSHIIHIDE
OTOMO

**WORDS - IN -
FREEDOM**

A

RT GALLERY MUSIC
IMPROVISATION
AVANT-GARDE
ELECTRONIC
DRONES
NOISE
LOUD
WEIRD
FUN

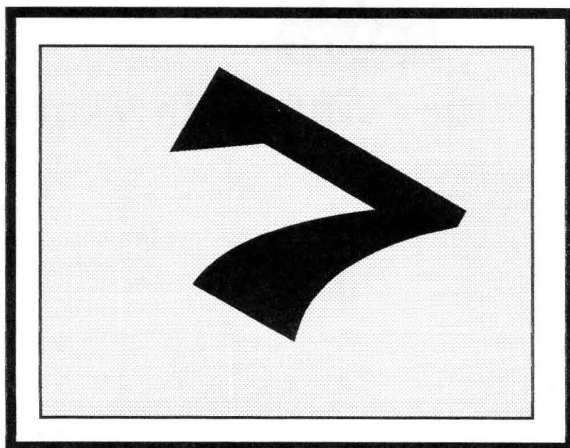
The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

CREDITS

ED PINSENT - Editor,
Writer and Publisher; also
typography, design, collages
and drawings

Contributors

WAR ARROW
RICHARD REES JONES
RIK RAWLING
CHRIS ATTON
DISINFORMATION
ANDY MARTIN
IAN MIDDLETON



REVOLVER USA, 2525 16th Street, Third
Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103, USA

SELEKTION, Hohenstaufenstrasse 8, D-60327,
Frankfurt am Main, Germany

SOLEILMOON, PO Box 83296, Portland, OR
97283, USA

STAALPLAAT, PO Box 11453, 1001 GL,
Amsterdam, Netherlands

THESE RECORDS, 112 Brook Drive, London
SE11 4TQ

TOUCH, 13 Oswald Road, London SW17 7SS

XI RECORDS, PO Box 1754, Canal Street
Station, New York, NY 10013, USA

IMAGES

Ian Middleton: pp 3, 16, 34, 44, 56

Rik Rawling: pp 5, 26, 40, 68, 88, 90, 109

Ed Pinsent: pp 6, 14, 15, 46, 54, 57, 63, 80, 91, 111

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War Arrow: p 120

People Like Us: pp 18, 19, 20, 22

Nigel Ayers: pp 49, 51, 52

The cover is a pastiche of *Der Dada* first issue, Berlin June 1919,
edited by Raoul Hausmann.



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USA

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Editorial Address: THE SOUND

PROJECTOR, BM INDEFINITE,
LONDON WC1N 3XX, UNITED
KINGDOM

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Special thanks this issue:

CARL GLOVER for Photoshop assist

HARLEY RICHARDSON - keeper of the website

ED BAXTER - introductions and connections



PLEASE NOTE: The Sound Projector is happy to receive:

- * Sample CDs and sample tapes
- * Submissions from writers
- * Picture contributions from cartoonists or illustrators
- * Feedback from readers
- * Support from advertisers
- * Constructive suggestions of any kind

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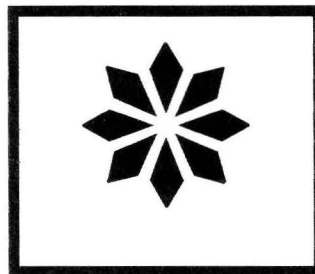
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This is a highly detailed, symmetrical black and white geometric pattern, characteristic of traditional rug or tapestry designs. The central focus is a large, stylized sun or starburst motif with radiating lines. Below this, there are two large, curved, leaf-like shapes. The entire design is framed by a wide border composed of repeating geometric patterns, including triangles and zig-zags. The pattern is highly intricate, with many small details and a strong sense of balance.

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have to call them 'non-specific' noises for some reason, because so removed from original source material and extremely hard to pinpoint as to where they're happening in the stereo picture. A thrilling uncertainty - as nebulous as the gaseous angel. Such disorientation of course only adds to the excitement. 'Desert' is pretty good too, an enlarged widescreen psycho-drama picture of spiritual nothingness suggested only by treated environmental recordings, faintly skipping scratchy vinyl, and a nagging sense of emptiness continually pounding away in the empty, purplish sky of sound. A fine effort from this Stockholm-born sound artist, realised with money from the Swedish Government it seems.

ED PINSENT

A.M.B.

96 11 16

JAPAN, UNITED
SYNDICATE USDR-01 CDR
(LTD 50 COPIES)

Engraved on this handpainted artefact be my most favoured sumptuous noise-fest to have come my way last year. Little is known about the mysterious A.M.B. except he/she/it lives in Tokyo and released this gorgeous handmade CD-R through the label and good graces of Kato Hideki, the man behind Bass Army. A.M.B.'s brand of noise may not be as extreme or exhilarating as some listeners would prefer (especially when weighed against the Merzbow periodic table, for example) but in the right mood this brand of deep-space asteroid blasto-music could be just what you're looking for. The dynamics are superb, evidence of a masterful noise-maker in control of his magnetic compass as he steers his raft over the Seven Seas of Cacophony. Like a spaceship pilot about to be drawn into a black hole, the second A.M.B. senses that chaos is about to take over, he pulls back on the joystick and eases up on the thruster rockets. The passenger / listener (that's you) enjoys that sudden thrill as the components of the swirling sound-aura suddenly focus into distinct areas; how can that insignificant blipping prevail over that harsh, buzzing feedback all of a sudden? It's all here, along with up-close amplifier hum, wonky analogue electronics, and a lovely contiguous pattern to the structure that makes it a must-play from start to finish. All three parts, down in one. Drink deep from this draught, ye knowers of the knarly knoise!

(That's if you can find a copy, of course...was available from BWCD at time of writing, but due to extreme limitation of the edition, probably not any more.)

ED PINSENT



Masonna

Spectrum Ripper

COLD SPRING CSR17CD CD (1998)

MADEMOISELLE ANNE SANGLANTE OU NOTRE NYMPHOMANIE AUREOLE

A cacophony in 25 parts, *Spectrum Ripper* sees our boy moving further into territory previously charted by fellow Japanese 'noise' musician Masami Akita. As with Merzbow's

interpretations: World War 4, the Silver Surfer vs Galactus, Leatherface's diary read out loud by a Tourettes-added robot, the soundtrack to a porn movie starring Giger's Alien, a T-1000 Terminator and Traci Lords in a 3-way gang bang that reaches its acid spewing orgasmic crescendo as Nemesis the Death Comet hits Ground Zero. Louder, faster and crazier than anything else Masonna transcends all attempts at explanation or definition. With *Spectrum Ripper* and its suggestions of 'structure' he has moved an inch closer to the still light-years-away *Top of the Pops* appearance. Let's see the ever-vacant Gail Porter announce that one with the same glib smile she usually reserves for the likes of Westlife! And let's see the look on her face after he's done his thing -

shambling off the stage, nothing but destruction in his wake, B*Witched quivering in the corner and whimpering for 'Mother'. Redemption, Revelation, Violation: Masonna.

RIK RAWLING 20/12/1999

Cold Spring, 87 Gloucester
Avenue, Delapre, Northampton
NN4 9PT
e-mail: coldspring@thenet.co.uk
www.thenet.co.uk/~coldspring

Dachise

Twin Braids

ASSEMBLAGE POINT
ASPO001CD (1999)

More cranky Dada noise, and an album which was originally available on cassette, although in terms of sound quality obviously an extremely well-recorded one. Your friend and mine, Mr Hideously Distorted Noise And Feedback makes a number of guest appearances amid patches of

silence, scratchy records of choirs, and aggravatingly looped samples, all reproduced with an intense clarity that allows one to appreciate the textures screaming away therein. Initially it sounds like 5,000 other CDs I've cursed Ed for passing my way, which, through my feeling duty-bound to listen to the buggers, have used up precious time that could've been spent doing the washing up, ordering pizzas, or masturbating furiously.

It starts off in the same way these sort of things usually do, but suddenly becomes interesting about a minute into the second track with some sort of feedback orchestra threatening to dump a tune into our laps whilst, tantalisingly, never quite doing it. Dachise use a lot of gritty textures looped into rhythms, which probably saves *Twin Braids* from becoming hopelessly abstract, and much of it sounds like you could get a nasty cut if you listened too closely. Of its kind, Merzbow is perhaps superior, but then there's a lot of similar things out there which this just micturates all over in terms of balancing the fine line between yer 'interesting use of amplified washing machine' and actually listening to the bleeder more than once.

My only complaint, beyond this not being hip hop, is that there's too much of this noise stuff that only does one thing at a time.

own 1930 what we have here is some leaning towards 'structure' with noticeable rises and falls, near silent pauses and an almost 'organised' rush of high frequency distortion and screaming feedback. Masonna has not necessarily tamed the whirlwind but he's now channelling it in directions of his choosing, stopping along the way to consider his next move. The pauses amidst the thunder are like sound effects from a Gerry Anderson series which certainly brings a smirk to the proceedings. The cover art of shadows, stained torsos and ancient blades sets a dark tone initially but it's difficult not to smile with Masonna as he prises open the bars of the zoo cage of consensus reality and unleashes his lupine howl, compressing it through every conceivable gadget available. Loops of his distorted rants and snarls sound like the souped up riffs of contemporary rock bands who've leapt on that electronica bandwagon. Elsewhere there's shades of Pussy Galore a la 'Spit n Shit' and Atari Teenage Riot at their most disorganised - so it's 'punktechnoiselectronics' - well, maybe it is to those who need their neat compartments.

As usual, with tracks titled 'Part IV, Part V' and so on, it's difficult to raise any hook upon which to hang Masonna's aesthetic intent. At least Merzbow drops a few clues with his titles but this guy seems determined to leave us confused and adrift on a sea of possible

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Dachise do two things at a time in many places, and even when this isn't the case, the cacophony is usually of sufficient textural depth to hold the attention. Generally speaking I'd like to see a trend towards these noise merchants daring to have more going on. Being sparing and minimal with your sonic statement is all very well, but if you're putting it on CD then folks will listen to it. So it'd be nice if any aggravation resulted from the author's mighty power over all forms of noise, rather than boredom and a thinner wallet. Do these people think 'Hmmm, at seven minutes this solo screech doesn't seem quite long enough' or 'that noise is making it just too darned interesting, better drop it'? Oh...and while I'm on the subject, this thing of dropping sounds in and out of the mix dry, without attack or decay, whilst initially startling on a few Nurse With Wound albums about twenty years ago, is starting to sound as obvious and hackneyed as the phrase 'c'mon everybody let's rock' does on the sort of records you expect to find containing such a request. Come on you lot. Put a bit of elbow grease into it, eh?

Anyway, while *Twin Braids* could still go further, it seems like a step in the right direction, and there's enough to suggest that the author cares about his work. I don't know when I'll play this again exactly, and it certainly won't be when I have folks around in order to spoil them with my Ferrero Rocher, but it has at least been saved from being hung on a nail in the privy with all those other Dissecting Table and Dominator CDs which are, if nothing else, kinder to your arse than your ears.

WAR ARROW

18 Pilton Place, Edinburgh, EH5
2EX, Scotland
assemblagepoint@hotmail.com

Astro

MSG of Electronics Wave

GERMANY, TOCHNIT ALEPH 007 VINYL LP (1999)

A fine solo work from Hiroshi Hasegawa, whom most of you will know already from the great Japanese noise band C.C.C.C., generators of some of the heaviest - but also the most soothingly-musical - pure atomic noise from Japan. Weirdly, there's arguably little difference between this and any C.C.C.C. track you might still be able to extract from the US label RRR, except that it's somehow less...well, less dense. Hiroshi may require the listener to concentrate more on the nuances of ear-splitting din without the distractions of two other performers getting in the way. As Astro, Hiroshi may not be in the league of Merzbow, but he works hard to make this a rewarding experience, with lots of manic analogue synth sound sources and much electronic manipulation of same. In this he comes close

to aping the demented glory of a Sun Ra moog solo, only if anything he's far more extreme in his cosmic explorations. Pressed in 220g white vinyl, limited to 50 copies and equipped with a bizarre science fiction sleeve of plastic dolls floating in an infinite galaxy. Copies were available through Fourth Dimension last year; or try the manufacturer direct.

ED PINSENT

D Lowenbruck, Schliemanstrasse 13, Berlin
10437, Germany.



they choose to release) behind which is hiding Masami Akita's boldest and most focused statement to date. Wagnerian in its scope and delivery this is Merzbow's masterpiece, a towering example of HOW FAR you can take things when you just try. As always with Merzbow this sonic alchemy seems like a piece of piss for him - NO conventional band on this planet, not even a supergroup made up of Slayer, Napalm Death, Anal Cunt, Aphex Twin and Kraftwerk (just picture it!) could begin to come close to what this one man produces with his equipment. It starts

slowly, like an engine turning over, and then quickly goes into turbocharged Hiroshima mode - and stays there for over an hour. It just never quits. The familiar quasar-dense backdrop of electronic thunder is there, the metallic Gdansk shipyard explosions are there, the jarring depth charge edits are there - but it's all cranked up so much higher than it's ever been before. Here Akita seems inspired, by demons driven to rip out some new shit this time. Where before a high pitched feedback whine would rush by, here it stays, a cyborg Howler Monkey sinking its claws into your skull and screeching in your ear, feeding its primal spinal signal directly into the soft and dormant parts of your brain. Then it's off, dancing across the tops of the oncoming waves - 200 feet high, stretching across the horizon, about to crash down on cities on fire and vast lakes of sizzling protoplasm. Gigantic chrome tentacles, each a mile long, break through the churning ocean surface and on wings of black leather and bullet proof glass the great god Cthulu heaves itself up into the sky, stretching its maw wide enough to swallow history, and looses a scream of rebirth that echoes across the universe, shredding nebulae as it passes. It flies off, gliding like a living moon across continents that heave like flesh as seismic spasms thrust jets of magma up into the sky. Meteors of

molten cum ejaculated from the bleeding heart of the Earth rain down across the land and seas. Islands rise and fall against one another, hurricanes race across the latitudes heaving the raw matter of the planet's surface before them. Cthulu rides the jet streams, pissing acid and liquid nitrogen down onto the horrified faces of those who never dared to believe.

OR - it's an empty room, lit by a single bare bulb. In the centre of the room is a chair. A man is sat in the chair, dressed in clothes of drab shades. He is staring out of a black window but not seeing anything. His eyes are wide open. His face is utterly without expression. He continues to stare. What he has done or about to do we can't ever know for sure but he is like us and therefore capable of anything.

And Merzbow 1930 is the sound in his head.

Merzbow

1930

TZADIK TZ7214 CD (1998)

I bought my copy of this CD at Wall of Sound, 2237 2nd Avenue at Bell, Seattle USA (wos@speakeasy.org) from the most comprehensive range of Merzbow and extreme Japanese music that I've ever seen. I was literally spoilt for choice but finally settled on this release because it looked and felt 'important', loaded with potential. The dude behind the counter regarded my purchase with a single nod and looked at me over the top of his glasses, exchanging with me a look of private understanding. I had made the right choice.

Respect is due to the graphics department at Tzadik for more excellent packaging (if only the same could be said for some of the music

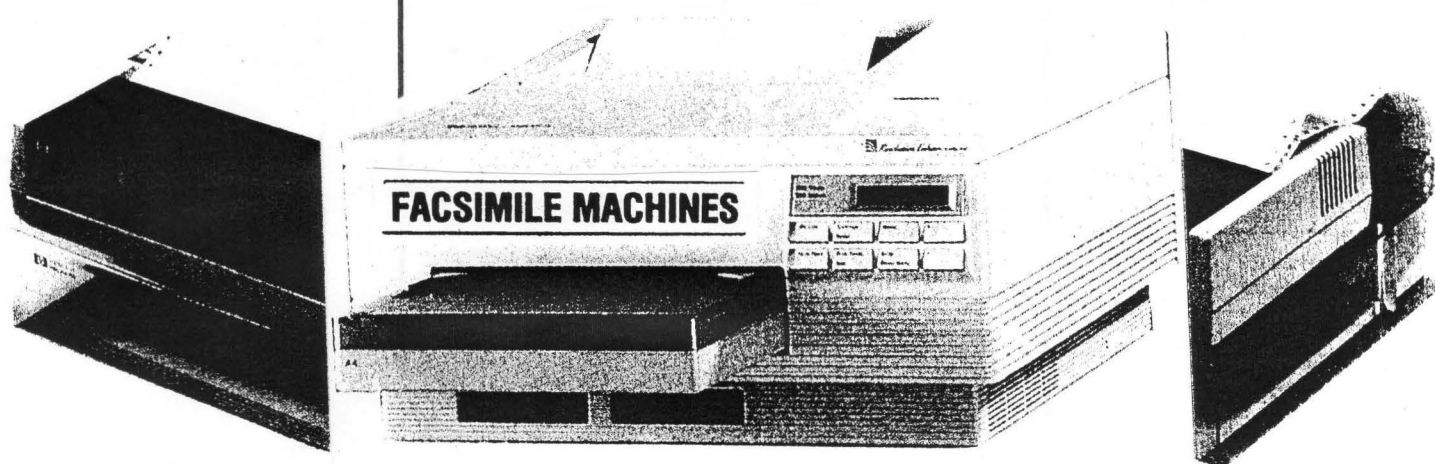
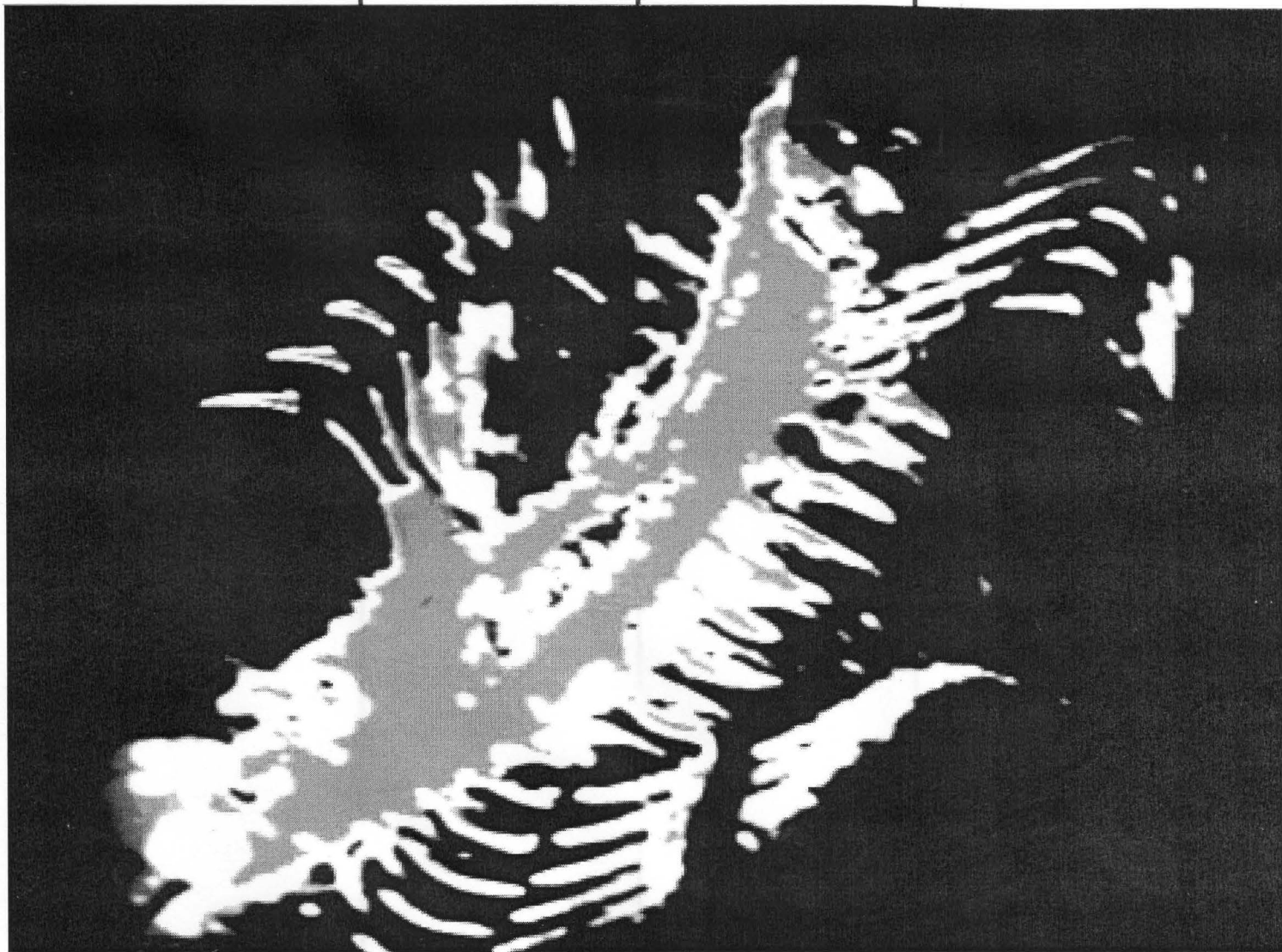
"GIGANTIC CHROME TENTACLES, EACH A MILE LONG, BREAK THROUGH THE CHURNING OCEAN SURFACE AND ON WINGS OF BLACK LEATHER AND BULLET PROOF GLASS THE GREAT GOD CTHULU HEAVES ITSELF UP INTO THE SKY..."

RIK RAWLING
23/12/1999

Tzadik, 61 East Eighth
Street - Suite 126, New
York, NY 10003, USA
www.tzadik.com

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turning into a M ↑ C R O C H ↑ P



■■■ ANOTHER RANT OF BITTERNESS AND BILE... ■■■

BY THE TIME YOU'RE READING THIS, WE HAVE ALREADY COME THROUGH THE Y2K HYPE-A-THON WITHOUT HAVING ENDURED ANYTHING RESEMBLING A J.G. BALLARD COLLAPSE-OF-CIVILISATION SCENARIO. THIS COMMONPLACE OBSERVATION IS SIMPLY TO JUSTIFY ANOTHER NEW SECTION OF MUSIC REVIEWS. IT'S ABOUT TIME WE HAD THE ARTISTS' TAKE ON THE SOFTWARE REVOLUTION, BECAUSE TO MY WAY OF THINKING EVERYTHING TO DO WITH COMPUTERS HAS ALREADY BECOME SO COMPLETELY DEBASED AND ABSURD. AND IT'S HAPPENED SO QUICKLY TOO. THE MOST OBVIOUS AND VISIBLE SIGNS ARE HOW CHEAP AND COMMERCIALISED COMPUTERS HAVE BECOME - MARKETING IN THE LOWEST AND TATTIEST POSSIBLE WAY. CD ROMS, THOSE BRIGHT SILVER DISCS, ONCE SEEN AS 'SPECIAL' TOOLS FOR RUNNING PROGRAMMES, ARE BECOMING TRASH IMMEDIATELY NOWADAYS; LITTLE KIDS HELP THEMSELVES TO FREE PROGRAMMES ON GAUDY PACKETS STACKED IN A CARDBOARD DISPLAY IN WOOLWORTHS, ONLY TO THROW THEM IN THE BIN INSTANTLY. OBNOXIOUS SPOTTY SCHOOL-LEAVERS DRESSED IN CORPORATE GREY CURRY'S OUTFITS STOP YOU IN THE STREET AND TRY AND PERSUADE YOU TO ACCEPT FREE INTERNET ACCESS. AND FOR YEARS THEY'VE BEEN TRYING TO CONVINCE YOU THAT A COMPUTER IS ANOTHER NECESSARY ADJUNCT TO YOUR FAMILY LIFE - COMPANIES LIKE T**E, T**Y AND D**L WILL TRY AND SELL YOU SOME OVERPRICED PIECE OF JUNK COMPLETE WITH DIGITAL CAMERA AND SOUND-CARD, CONTINUALLY PUSHING THE IMAGE OF A HAPPY FAMILY THAT NEEDN'T

FEEL OVERWHELMED BY THE MINUTIAE OF TECHNOLOGY - IE THEY WON'T HAVE TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES EVER AGAIN. BUT THAT'S JUST A SNAPSHOT OF LATE 1990S LIFE WHICH NEEDN'T JUST APPLY TO COMPUTERS - IT COULD APPLY TO VIRTUALLY ANYTHING.

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HOW ABSURDLY INEFFICIENT COMPUTERS REALLY ARE? I HAVE TO LOOK INTO THIS FOR MY JOB, WHICH INVOLVES A LITTLE RESEARCH IN THE ISSUES OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS MANAGEMENT. ELECTRONIC RECORDS ARE RECORDS WHICH DEPEND ON THE SOFTWARE THAT CREATED THEM TO REMAIN READABLE. IN ORDER TO CAPTURE AND PRESERVE DATA ARCHIVALLY, WE HAVE TO CAPTURE SOME OF THE SOFTWARE TOO. TURNS OUT THAT A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF COMPUTER MEMORY IS NOT DATA OR INFORMATION - IT'S SIMPLY TAKEN UP TO PERFORM LOTS OF OPERATIONS THAT HELP PUT THAT DATA TOGETHER. YOUR BRILLIANT DOCUMENT WHICH TOOK HOURS OF HARD TOIL DOESN'T 'EXIST' IN ONE PLACE IN THE COMPUTER - IT'S FRAGMENTED INTO LOTS OF TINY BYTES, MOST OF WHICH ARE SHEER GIBBERISH, AND IT'S THE SOFTWARE'S JOB TO ASSEMBLE THE MOSAIC FROM THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE CYBERSPACE GLOBE. BECAUSE IT ALL HAPPENS SO QUICKLY, AND IS PRESENTED WITH SUCH SMOOTH HIGH-TECH GRAPHICS ON-SCREEN, YOU RECEIVE THE ILLUSION THAT THE OPERATION IS CLEVER, INSTANT, AND EFFICIENT. FAR FROM IT. AMONGST ALL THE TRAFFIC OF DATA FLOWING AROUND YOUR NETWORK ARE POSTED MILLIONS AND MILLIONS OF

'TRAFFIC COPS' - A WASTEFUL AND EXPENSIVE SET-UP MERELY TO PRESERVE THIS GROTESQUE ILLUSION OF ORDER AND SAFETY. A BIT LIKE MODERN CIVILISATION, REALLY!

THE ARTISTS LUMPED TOGETHER IN THIS MUSICAL CATEGORY HAVE, I THINK, SUCCEEDED IN EXPOSING THIS MODERN FRAUD AND ITS MANY INVIDIOUS ASPECTS IN VARIOUS CLEVER WAYS. ALL OF THEM SENSE THE SHEER CHAOS AND INANE GIBBERISH THAT LURKS AT THE HEART OF THE MICROPROCESSOR. THE TRUE LANGUAGE OF COMPUTERS IS UNINTELLIGIBLE - AN ABSTRACT, MECHANICAL CODE THAT BECOMES UNREADABLE ONCE THE SOFTWARE THAT GENERATED IT BECOMES OBSOLETE. THESE CDS, IN MUSIC OR IN SOUND, LAY BARE THE MECHANICS OF THE MEANINGLESS OPERATIONS OF A TYPICAL SOFTWARE PROGRAM. BUT MORE THAN THIS, THEY PROCEED TO HARNESS THAT ENERGY AND SUBVERT IT - TURN IT AGAINST ITSELF, BUT ALSO TURN IT INTO SOMETHING USEFUL - SOMETHING AESTHETICALLY PLEASING IN ITS AUSTERE AND MECHANICAL WAY. OF COURSE, A LOT OF THE TIME, THE RESULTS CAN BE EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT TO LISTEN TO - STRANGE AND UNNATURAL - AND CAN PRESENT PROBLEMS IF WE'RE BEING ASKED TO PROCESS IT AS MUSIC. BUT IT IS THROUGH THIS INTERACTIVE PROCESS THAT WE STAND A CHANCE OF EMPOWERING OURSELVES AGAIN.

I USE THE WORD 'INTERACTIVE' ADVISEDLY. I KNOW NONE OF YOU ARE FOOLED BY THE FRAUDULENT CLAIM THAT CERTAIN WEBSITES, CD ROMS, ONLINE DIGITAL SERVICES, TV CHANNELS, OR INTERNET BANKING SYSTEMS ARE IN SOME WAY 'INTERACTIVE'. INTERACTIVE, MY CLEPES! ANSWERING MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS BY CLICKING ON A BIG COLOURED GRAPHIC WITH YOUR

MOUSE - IS ABOUT AS INTERACTIVE AS BANGING ON A PAVING STONE WITH A PLASTIC HAMMER! WHAT KIND OF DIALOGUE OR RELATIONSHIP CAN WE HAVE WITH SUCH SIMPLISTIC BINARY SYSTEMS? THE TRUTH IS THESE THINGS ARE WHOLLY MANIPULATIVE, REDUCING THE END-USER TO A MERE PUPPET. WE MERRILY PRESS OUR ICONS DREAMING OF FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND CONNECTING TO A NEW WORLD, WHEN WE ARE MORE LIKE SOME HALF-MAD INMATES OF BEDLAM FOOTLING WITH A TATTERED BAUBLE FOR THE AMUSEMENT OF THE PASSERS-BY. I STAND BY WHAT I WROTE IN ISSUE 4 - 'TELEVISION, ADVERTISING, CINEMA AND THE INTERNET ARE INCOHERENT, GIBBERING MONSTERS; EATING INFORMATION, NOT RELAYING IT; THEY ARE LUMBERING CYCLOPS ADRIFT IN THE COSMOS.'

A BLEAK VIEW, I KNOW - AND SINCE I'M ABOUT TO BUY A NEW MESH PC AT TIME OF WRITING, I INCLUDE MYSELF IN THIS BITTER SCENARIO TOO, SO DON'T FEEL ALIENATED. RATHER, SELECT AND SPIN SOME OF THESE DISCS BELOW FOR A GLIMPSE INTO THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE HEARTLESS COMPUTER MONSTER, AND LEARN YOUR OWN WAYS TO SUBVERT, AND SO MASTER, THE CHAOS OF TECHNOLOGY. TURN INTO A MICROCHIP TODAY!

ED PINSENT



Fennesz
+475637-165108
[plus forty seven
degrees 56'37"
minus sixteen
degrees 51'08"]
TOUCH TO:40 CD (1999)

Christian Fennesz, one of the Mego 'superstars', and the man who brought us the sublime *Fennesz Plays 45* last year, is on the warpath like a roaring beast here. The Mego team, concentrating on generating truly modern electronic music, have dispensed with conventional instruments like sequencers,

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drum machines and synths - and started to tinker directly with the sort of computer programming that makes such machines work in the first place. The most efficient way to do it seems to be to bypass the instruments and go straight to the programme, via a Powerbook. Using the keyboard and mouse, an intelligent artisan can vary the nature of his soundforms however he chooses.

You'd be forgiven for thinking this is record in no way 'musical'. Under normal circumstances I'd be put off too, but one listen to the furious and powerful sound textures on this (and other Mego-related items) will excite your neurons in ways you'd never dreamed possible - and change your mind in a second. This work is in fact more musical than much of what passes for musical entertainment in the welter of techno-based releases. At first listen, this may seem an excessively abstract work - perhaps brutally so. But all the features of exciting music are there, really - depth, texture, dynamics, volume and rhythm - but expressed as purely abstract, digital tones, freed from the associations of melody and harmony.

There are at least three great features to Christian Fennesz's work. One - unpredictability. His best moments - and these would include the wonderful final track on this not-overlong CD - confound the expectations of any listener, leaving one puzzled. What was that? Why did it stop so suddenly when it was just starting to say something? This sense of puzzlement can turn into a good thing, if you'll let it. This music is not inconsequential, because it leaves a very strong impression with you.

Two - Brevity. There's a lot of information in a Fennesz track. He has more ideas than most electronic buffoons manage in their entire career, so many indeed that he plays two or three of them together at the same time. Each component is clearly stated, and the listener needs only to work that little bit harder to distinguish the lines of thought. But be quick, because many of these tracks are tight and concise.

Three - pleasure. Fragments of musical notes bubble up from time to time within the flying sheets of crunchy, textured noise. A noise so palpable it's like the inside of a Crunchy Bar. Or is rather that some of these tracks started life as a melodious tune, and have been extensively reworked and taken apart into their basic, mechanical components?

This is the second solo full-length recording from Christian Fennesz - the first was *Hotel Parallel* - and it's made entirely with a guitar and a computer. And it's absolutely superb.

ED PINSENT

A more complete MEGO survey will appear in issue 8.

value to be reclaimed from the past. I've referred above in my rant to the relentless treadmill of consumerism that seems to be magnified considerably in the mass market for computers; software designers constantly tinker with programmes, bringing out a new 'upgraded' version annually, thus supposedly

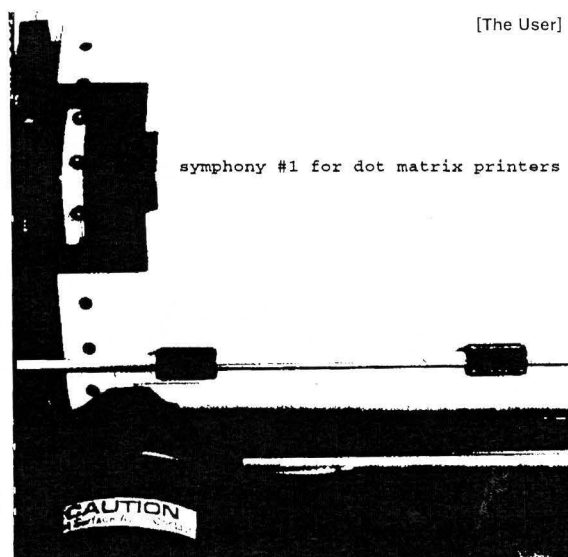
computer would: at hyper-speed, mechanically, and without discrimination. It's an exhilarating listen. In less than an hour, you can take a whirlwind space-ship tour of the entire planet. It can be a frightening snapshot of the hideous excesses of 20th century modern life today, but that's nothing; what's worse is the even more frightening visions of the future lying in wait for us all.

Effectively, this CD uses the methods of classical musique concrète - and gathers hours of sampled tapes from real life. Mostly human voice samples, but also natural and imaginary sounds, then proceeds to reprocess the tapes. All the composers here do their reprocessing through computers or computer based methods, and each achieve disturbing results in their own special way. Through reconstruction of documentary sources, and transferring magnetic tape into digital bytes, tiny fragments of future possibilities leak through onto the CD, and thence through your speakers. The only drawback is how you interpret this information - it won't help you win the National Lottery, but then it might give you the edge on your colleagues at work who are still living in the UK circa 1955.

There probably isn't anything very new about scrambling obtainable data to obtain a new spin on the present. If Nostradamus could have been bothered, he too might have used computers; all he effectively did was analyse and process the facts, moods and elements of his own time to discern a prototype for human behaviour. By restating these patterns in a certain way, he delivered plausible scenarios for the next thousand years. Actually they were completely implausible, and their appeal only arises from the threatening elements in selected verses that seem to refer to our own century, and these were mistranslated in the first place. So as for seeing the future - it's complete bunkum!

But this CD still contains a vast array of complex information, and because the sound-picture it presents is so hyper-busy and thrillingly intense, there's a sublime listening pleasure to be had from trying to listen to all of its corners simultaneously. For the most part, the trip is extremely loud and terror-inducing, with the exception of one long conceptual quiet track with lots of disembodied voices.

Part of a magazine series from Michael Harding's Touch



[The User] Symphony #1 for dot matrix printers NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT STMCD 016 CD (1999)

Ah, now here's an entertaining angle. This joker has recorded the sound of hardware - in this case some clapped-out dot matrix printers doing their thang, with overdubs and effects pedals to give those weedy sounds some extra oomph, and now presents it as a diverting form of music. To discover such ancient near-obsolescent machines inside an office environment would provoke howls of mirth amongst your colleagues - are you still using that old thing, they cry? So [The User] rescues them from oblivion and inscribes their creaky gasps, buzzes and wheezes onto a recording and preserves them for posterity. It might still provokes howls of mirth from some listeners, but for different reasons. In the same way, seasoned computer gamers prize their 1979 Atari consoles above the latest version of Dreamcast (actually, they don't...); musicians cling to their old valve amplifiers, Copycat echo units and analogue synths because they sound and perform much better than modern digitised units. [The User] demonstrates there is much

rendering the previous version obsolete. Indeed there is one reassuring TV advert for a company that builds in some kind of insurance contract that means you won't get left behind when all the software and hardware you just bought is upgraded next year, and you're left stranded with version 1.2. This greedy race for novelty, faster multi-tasking speeds and more memory space is exposed as a nonsensical caucus-race by this *Symphony* CD, which celebrates the hardware of yesteryear and frames it within an art context as enduring as Jasper Johns' Ballantyne beer cans cast in bronze. It may not be a massively innovative statement, but here it be.

ED PINSENT



Various Artists Or: Some Computer Music Issue 1 OR ISSUE 1 CD (1999)

[The User] above celebrates the physical nature of computer hardware. Here's another approach. The sound artists on this outstanding compilation turn themselves into virtual microprocessors, by absorbing huge tracts of found sounds and (through electro-acoustic methods) processing them in much the same way as a

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subsidiary label OR, this compilation brings together people from the world of academic composition, such as Trevor Wishart and Stephen Travis Pope, with avant-techno guys like General Magic and Aphex Twin. The booklet is packed with texts both readable and unreadable, screen shots from computer screens, and bewildering diagrams - plus paranoid-fuelled observations about the inexorable growth of city life, or the impact of automation on business and organisational structures. In this case the individual contributions are secondary to the whole effect of spinning the disc start to finish, edited together as a suite of ghastly visions of the whole state of the information-overloaded, fat and lazy world that prevails today. But no ironic images of baseball-cap wearing white trash gorged on MacDonalds fries; the substrata of moral decay is far more fascinating.

ED PINSENT



Shirt Trax Good News About Space

LIP 9 CD (1999)

18 bedevilled tracks here almost entirely realised using computers by Mark Fell and Jeremy Potter, who didn't however want to waste lots of time working with programming and sequencing. So a lot of this 'Good News' is brought to us by real-time playing on samplers. To their credit, Shirt Trax have a credo that runs 'we're not so much about the aesthetics of digital glitches or broken systems. We can't relate to that'. Given that Fell's other activities shade into installation art and that Potter is a Brighton-based DJ, a glib first impression would cast this record as bridging the gap between experimental art and dance music. Perhaps this kind of sound might just appeal to lovers of dance and Techno music, but this is a wholly wrong assumption...Shirt Trax certainly use dance-ish beats, but only a dedicated twitcher could slip into the shaking groove for the five or six seconds allowed before this music reverts to its brilliantly insanely illogical sequencing of strange and unearthly noises. 'Perplexing' doesn't even begin to describe this mind-melding mélange of sounds - these Shirt Trax are fucking with our minds big time. 20 odd tracks of totally electronic relentless absurdist pranks, mostly abstract noise of a

highly appealing mode. But occasionally lapsing into jokey retro styled nonsense that seems quaint, old-fashioned, imaginary soundtrack for non-existent 1950s cartoons or used in another imaginary World's Fair pavilion in some never-never land of the brain. 'We were aware of the kind of academic history of what we were doing, but we didn't relate to that either', muse Short Trax. You see, how music like this can make you remember things that never happened in the first place? Memory implants through art. People are always afraid of how computers might be able to rewrite history...one effective way to do this is to rewire people's brains with false impressions and false memories. There is no 'good news about space', after all Matt Groening's *Futurama* shows us a world where they've even forgotten who was the first man to land on the moon!

ED PINSENT



UBSB Traceroute

ASH INTERNATIONAL [RIP]
ASH # 4.7 VINYL LP [2000]

Now things are getting grim. One listen to this extremely strange mini-LP and you'll think twice before you sign up for Internet access, believe me. In fact, so horrified will you be that you'll probably launch a solo campaign for the complete abolition of the World Wide Web. This record, realised from a 'research centre' in Scandinavia by four European artists, comprises a solid wall of utterly alien noises, derived from (we are informed) 'data harvested from the Internet'. Anxious to probe further into the secrets of the web's darkest corners, these science-guys wrote a special sort of 'bug' programme that could convert all the data it encountered into soundfiles. They launched their 'bug' into the Internet ether in a clandestine way, letting it gather whatever traffic it could. Now we really were getting near the 'traffic cops' I was describing earlier; this 'bug' outwitted them all, laughing 'eat my dust, coppers!' as it sped past at 150 mph.

When the USBB boys retrieved their mighty micro-midget and hacked it open, this is what they found. Now, you could easily play this record and mistake it for some 30 minutes of white-noise aural garbage. And in a sense, digital garbage is what's out there anyway. But that is not

the point of this investigation. Instead, your brain feels like it's been instantly stuffed with information, as though you've been able to plug the cortex of your brain directly into a gushing bitstream. Of course, it's all pure fantasy - the sort of fantasy that our forefathers may have had when the radio was first invented. They probably looked up at the night sky and imagined they saw the ghosts of swing bands, announcers with plummy home counties accents, and corny soap opera actors all speaking at once, in a cosmic dance with the constellations. In the same way, we think we're so modern as we turn on our 52K Modems and start sweeping the world for useful fragments of knowledge. And what we find out there is an incoherent Tower of Babel, constructed out of Gigabytes, by narrow-minded nerds and faceless corporations in equal quantity.

More than any record so far in the list, this *Traceroute* record gets closest to the reality of the computer's sheer inanity. The only difference is that this record is barely recognisable as 'music', not even as a species of spaced-out, whacked-out Techno created by Zombie DJs from a chill-out room on Planet Pluto. Perhaps, in line with many of the Ash International releases, it's more of a documentary recording. In which case it's an extremely bleak vision of the future. Essential therefore.

ED PINSENT



Time's Up Obsolete

NETHERLANDS,
STAALPLAAT STMCD 017 3"
CD (1999)

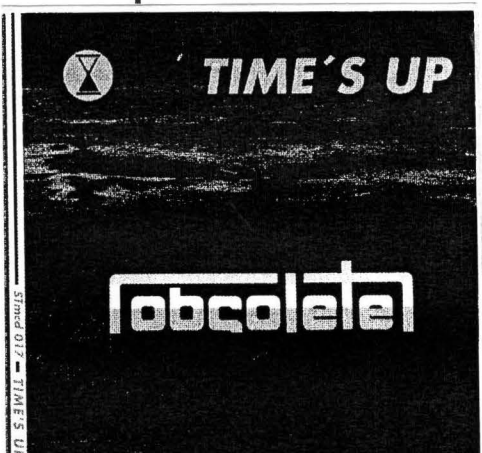
Yes, it's very jokey but not a totally disposable nugget of poppy pap. The Time's Up people are mainly obsessed with 1979, the year of Atari's Space Invaders, and use music clips from Pac-Man and associated arcade games - partly because they love the clunky technology, and partly just for the plain stubborn fun of being retro. A slap in the face to the ultra-graphic realism of Playstation, Nintendo 64 and Dreamcast. Through simple but clever edits, a

species of dumb Ur-Techno is revealed to have been lurking at the mechanical heart of our old vintage computer games - and this is the sound of Time's Up.

Also, sadly, they use a bundle of rather tired old samples and clips from equally retro sources, going back another 20 or so years from their starting point - Elvis, Las Vegas, Frank Sinatra and The Sands Hotel feature on one track, fairground music on another, telephone samples (yawn!) on a third - and silly cartoon voices (including groaning zombies!) pop up everywhere, making supposedly ironic comments on the vacuity of modern life, or something. Actually some of these little comic-strip vignettes work quite well, like the 'Keep Going' track that depicts a madcap race in Mad Max-styled cars. Less successful is the 'Nuclear Football' cut, which has the sheer gall to try on that old chestnut about how arcade games are only one step away from being World War Three. Yes, we've all seen that dumb John Badham movie too. Get outta here!

My sympathies however do go out to old hardware like the Commodore VC20, the BBC computer and the Amstrad. A lot of the information generated by these devices is quickly becoming unreadable, locked in a carrier medium that can't be read unless you visit a working computer museum (and they do exist, believe me). This may not seem a serious problem to you lot, but there is actually a significant quantity of information created by the Government which falls into this category. Unlike the old Chancery records, still readable today after over 1,000 years, we're heading for a future filled with public records which will be neither records (because the disks have decayed) or public (because nobody can access them).

ED PINSENT



Music from J A P A N

ダンボール ボックス・引出し式 組立説明図

- 多量の水分を含んだものの収納はご遠慮ください。
- 可燃物の収納はご遠慮ください。
- 衣類の収納には防虫シート・防虫剤等を使用してください。
- 紙製品につき、上面に重いものは載せないでください。

組立方法

外箱部品図		内箱部品図	
<p>前部 仕切 (2枚) 後部 外箱 鉄枠</p>	<p>内箱 (3個) 粘着テープ 取っ手 (3本)</p>	<p>1 後部</p> <p>仕切りを図のように曲げる。</p>	<p>1</p> <p>Aをおこす。</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Aの点線部分の位置に鉄枠をはめる。</p>	<p>2</p> <p>フラップを内側に折曲げる。</p>		
<p>3</p> <p>前部は 1、2 の順に内側にぴったり折り込む。</p>	<p>3</p> <p>フラップを包み込むようにBを折り込みつめて固定する。</p>		
<p>4</p> <p>後部から仕切りを入れ、前部のみぞにはめ込む。</p>	<p>4</p> <p>取っ手を半分に折り、先端を穴に通す。取っ手のテープをはがして上下に張り付ける。</p>		
<p>5</p> <p>フタは仕切りの折り曲げた間に差し込む。</p>	<p>6</p> <p>外箱出来上がり。</p>		
<p>完成図</p> <p>内箱を外箱に差し込んで完成。</p>			

GHOSTLY STRUNG NOTES • PRIME EXAMPLES OF THE
 GHOSTLY AND GRIM • BEBBLY VOICING AND
 PROBABLY VERY SEXY • PERVERTED FLESSES
 COLLORED DUNOZAR-SHAPED DOLLONS IN A
 CRUNKLY NOVTSENE BAG • PRECIOUS TARGET
 GREENADE EXPLOSIONS • BATHING IN RIVERS OF
 FIRE • REALLY A SAMBARGER OUTLET

- 説明文をよく読み、番号順に組み立ててください。
- 折線は、コンパクトにして持ち運びが便利ようについているもので、商品の強度・品質には関係ありません。
- 折組立時は角をへら等でなぞるときれいに仕上がります。

The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

High Rise Disallow

JAPAN, MODERN MUSIC (PSF RECORDS) PSFD-78 CD (1996)

If you hear nothing else, check out 'Icon' on this five-track mini-LP on a compact disc, a near perfect anthem of garage punk grunge guitar noise riffing which is propelled into outer space by the intense solo screechings of lead guitarist Munehiro Narito. Notable also here is the exemplary drumming, and brilliant drum sound, of Pill. If you've only heard records made after 1985 you may have forgotten what real drumming sounds like. This is it. You could almost pity him as a jazz drummer trapped in a power-rock trio, but this being Asahito Nanjo's trio there are no such genre-bound constraints. Freedom is their watchword. I don't know of Pill's outside activities in Tokyo, but rest assured he could play alongside Milford Graves and hold his head high. The reason I like 'Icon' - featured also on their blistering *Live CD* - so much is because it stuck in my mind after High Rise's perfect short set at The Centurion, which we reviewed in issue five...now when I slam it in the CD player I make a complete buffoon of myself as I caper about the room like a white ape on speed, knocking over the standard lamp. Only true testosterone-fuelled rock can do this, even to a nerdoid such as myself.

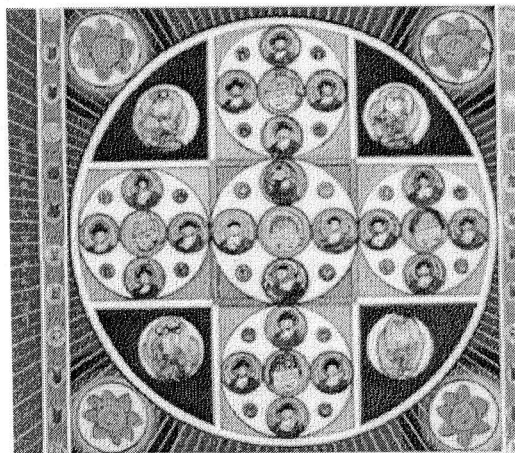
ED PINSENT

Pornoise 1KG

USA, RRR / STATUTORY TAPE
STATAP 17 5 X CASSETTES (1993)

Masami Akita to you, pal...this is a massive dollop of his early noise works, from a period about which I know very little but presume he was still displaying evidence of an interest in musique concrète (he'd been shocked as a teenager by hearing Pierre Schaeffer on the radio), and was practising a very extreme version of same; and that he was generating a brand of noise somewhat less loud and relentless than his post-1990 take no prisoners gale-force onslaught mode. Which isn't to suggest these 10 pieces are actually any more listenable than your copies of *Venerology* or *Pulse Demon* which you maniacs treasure so highly; these Pornoise exercises are still prime examples of the ghastly and grim, juxtaposing very nasty irruptive and disturbing noises with high-pitched whines, and occasionally throwing in some looped voice materials just to anchor you to some sense of reality. Because - be warned - there is an abiding sense of unreality that you can pick up from prolonged exposure to this sort of esoteric noise. The elements that make it all a bit more palliative are...well, there's a bit more space to get your bearings now and again (ie dynamics; nowadays a dense Merzbow piece barely pauses for breath, usually); and there are sometimes recognisable instruments

lurking like metal picnic tables in the foggy mixture, most probably some form of 1980s synth, attuned to an unholy setting which the manufacturers would certainly not recommend. Not because they might damage the machines, but because they would certainly damage the environment and all forms of carbon-based life in the immediate area. You can just see the dead pigeons piling up outside Masami's apartment as he



concocted these horrendous 40-minute hell-flavoured lollipops, like some twisted candy-man of the nether regions.

But hey- I'm concentrating on the wrong details - this box set is all about SEX! SEX! SEX!, a palpable presence flouncing and flopping about like enormous perverted flesh coloured dinosaur-shaped dollops in a crinkly polythene bag. It may only be a nasty rumour, but allegedly Masami Akita makes an alternative living as a pornographer, selling and exhibiting choice images of specialist bondage activities. In this pink Pornoise box, you get no bondage as such but through explicit titles you get basic blunt references like 'Loop Fuck' or 'Penis Art is Microphone'; and more subtle De Sadean suggestions of delicious transgression in 'De-Filement of his Nubile Young Wife'...the title lettering is printed in true retro 1970s style, harking back to the one true Golden Age of Porn (so they

tell me) ...and there are the sexy looped noises, including orgasmic grunts of satisfaction repeated into infinity (Masami Akita uses magnetic tape in the same way a bondage freak uses nylon cord), until effectively the whole human race takes on the appearance of big greasy hogs drenched in sweat and covered with orange lard.

Taboo noises, images, ideas - they may start out shocking and objectionable, but amazingly you get used to it very quickly. It kinda washes over you after a while, but there's no doubt that this extreme noise is intended as the perfect musical accompaniment to a good bout of anal teenage fucking activity - the rhythms could help any impotent man get into gear, I suspect. This sentiment of course is backed up by the atrocious sleeve design by Trevor Brown, a draughtsman of rapidograph-wielding fame whose work is I understand highly valued among the Whitehouse school of followers. Finding his clinical renderings of close-up genitalia boring beyond belief, I choose not to number myself among their ranks, but what do you care... This was originally issued on Masami's own ZSF Produkt label in Japan in 1984, then in 1993 this weird reissue box popped out from RRR in America no doubt during a phase when they were intent on fucking up the minds of the world with sick perverted

noise. It probably would have been part of Extreme label's reissue programme of 50 Merzbow CDs, if they could ever have got it together.

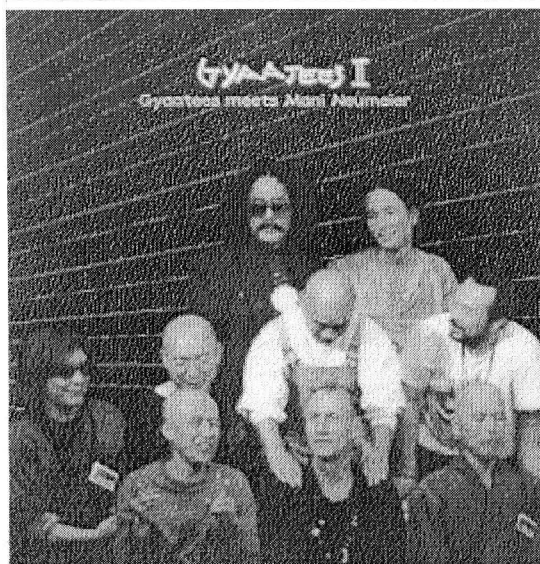
ED PINSENT

Gyaatees Gyaatees Volume 2: Gyaatees Meets Mani Neumeier

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP RECORDS
CTCD-181 / 182 2 X CD (1999)

Cosmic Kurushi Monsters was a fantastic introduction to the brave new world of Japanese rock music and remains a favourite 'round our way'. Consequently I've developed what's best described as a 'prepared ear' for anything that bounces off that side of the planet and into the Rough Trade racks. Lacking the mad packaging I've come to expect from our sushi-snarling cousins the cover photos of what looks like shaved Tibetan monks and concentration camp survivors suggested an altogether more serious venture. Fair enough.

It kicks off with what sounds like a child's toy being intermittently squeezed by a bored adult watching daytime TV. Bass rumbles and ghostly string notes emerge and it has all the makings of a truly disturbing horror movie soundtrack - with no small debt to Varèse at his most 'challenging'. Unfortunately, any chance for the listener to immerse themselves in the controlled maelstrom is ruined by the incessant ranting of the vocalists. They could be cries of pain or orgasmic release but they serve NO purpose,



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corrupting the atmospherics like a turd in the stewpot.

Impressed by the musicianship I persevered but the karaoke madmen never let up for the entirety of both discs. And unlike the vocal technique of someone like Yamantaka Eye or Masonna, who raise the hackles and plenty of questions (the least of which being 'What ARE they on?') this is just annoying. Even if arch-noise deviants V/V/M managed to splice Slint with 'The Birdie Song' it wouldn't sound as ruined as this.

Based on the evidence here it could be argued that, after once sounding so fresh and energised, the Japanese approach to structure and rock dynamics has become as dull and predictable as that which it initially promised to sweep away. Recent 'New Japan' releases from Tzadik have all sounded like variations on the same hurried wank and coming after the genuinely amazing and groundbreaking work of Ground Zero, Boredoms, Optical 8, and Melt Banana this merely sound like a bunch of competent but mad old fools, resigned to doing the house band gig on a cruise liner going nowhere.

RIK RAWLING 08/12/1999

*Captain Trip Records, 3-17-14
Minami-Koiwa, Edogawa-Ku, Tokyo,
Japan*



Gyaatees

Gyaatees Volume 3:

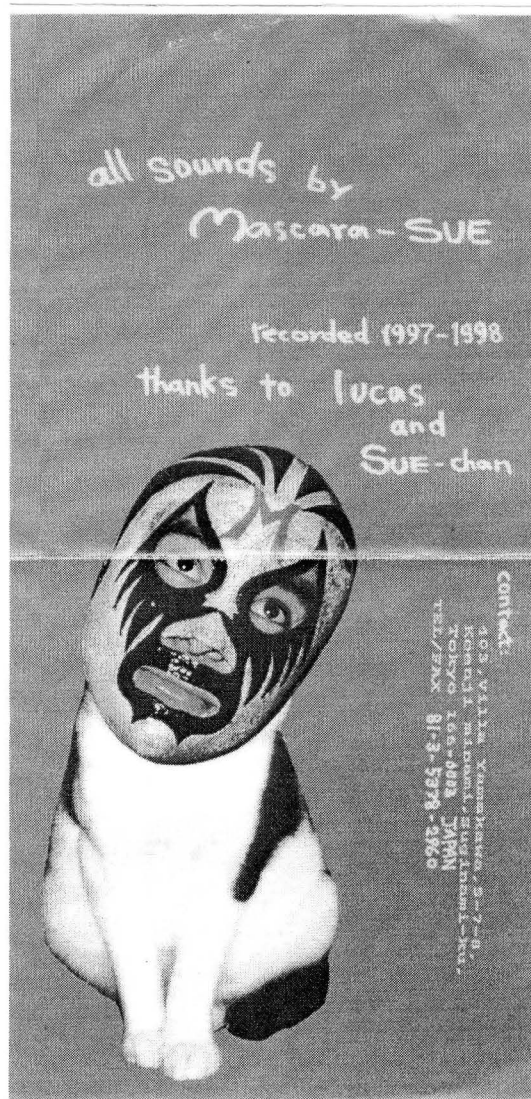
Welcome Motoharu -

Yoshizawa Last Live

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP

RECORDS CTCD-200 CD (1999)

After being less than impressed by *Gyaatees II* I wasn't exactly looking forward to this. But it starts out well enough - a slow build, solemn and earnest and not a million miles away from something like *Godspeed You Black Emperor!* Intrigued by this I pressed on - bloodcurdling 80s synth and Level 42-style bass slowly lowered into molten vats like Arnie at the end of *T2*, a grim mood shot through with shafts of light from the Toy Shop. It could easily be a Naked City single (ah, if only. Storming the Top Ten. Yamantaka Eye scaring the shit out of the Scub7 girls backstage at TOTP) played at 33rpm on a crappy old ghetto blaster dropped down a lift shaft. Maybe I'm making it sound better than it actually is - but it is musically interesting - dynamic, focused and, at times, not unlike Miles Davis circa *Live Evil/Dark Magus* but it is ruined beyond all hope by the monks howling in the background. Don't these guys know when they are on to a good thing? Musically they'd get my vote anyway but somebody should tell those fuckers who can't shut up to do just that. Better yet, muzzle them, slash their throats - whatever it takes to stop them emitting any kind of sounds from their gullets. You may think I'm overstating the case but there is a great record here strangled at birth. It's like playing Miles Davis and having your



window open while outside a gang sing the Chas N Dave back catalogue. A whole album of this is simply taking the piss.

RIK RAWLING 08/12/1999



Mascara-Sue

Biro²

AUSTRALIA, DUAL PLOVER HPO649
CD (1999)

A real winner this one, a mini-CD of very eccentric Japanese indie pop music adding more weight to the Dual Plover grand project of world domination through pop music - or to be precise, high-quality, subversive, and eccentric popular music. The unbridled enthusiasm effervescing from the bubbly, young and probably very sexy players is infectious; not since Jad Fair and his brother David unleashed the triple LP set *Half Gentlemen Not Beasts*, have we heard such unfettered energy, the pent-up release of happy youngsters just fizzing with sheer gratitude to be finally let loose in a recording studio like tiny tots in the world's biggest sweetshop. Mascara-Sue deploy a winning formula - sweet sing-song voices, cheesy

organ, biscuit tin drums and whatever else they can seize with their tongues, setting it against walls of feedback and grindy noise which assume the shape of the walls of a big bouncy castle. Not an original formula to be sure, but The Jesus and Mary Chain and My Bloody Valentine never managed anything as natural-sounding as these larksters. Then again, you know what a sap I am for all things Japanese...this yummy release comes in a bright process-red package and looks good enough to eat. But then, wait'll you see the inner-sleeve collage of a pussy cat with a wrestling mask face...even an old grouch like me is lapping this up, so just think what you seventeen year-old hipsters will make of it.

ED PINSENT

*PO Box 983, Darlinghurst, NSW 1300,
Australia*

www.ebom.org/plover



Yximalloo

Yximalloo

USA, OLD GOLD RECORDINGS
696969, VINYL LP (1999)

I've grown to regard Old Gold releases with the same sense of trepidation that overwhelms me when I see a paper seller for the Socialist Worker Party approaching, desperately trying to make eye contact, wearing his regulation issue ordinary-bloke-just-like-you-even-though -Daddy-is-the-head-honcho-at-ICI denims. That is, nearly everything I've heard from the label has been uniformly shite but for one or two tracks which, through actually being listenable, only serve to emphasise the sheer crapitudinousness (if that's a word) of the rest.

So, boy - is this a pleasant surprise, although as it's actually a compilation of Yximalloo things previously released on the Japanese label Sakura, perhaps my theory still stands. Whatever. Yximalloo is the great endeavour of one Naofumi Ishimaru, or perhaps was, if the fact that the tracks here date from between 1981 to 1986 at the latest is an indication. He worked with pretty basic equipment by the sound of it, and the recordings are of cassette quality, or to be more specific, 1980s cassette quality. This isn't a bad thing. The music still works, but is leant a primitive ambience as though much of this stuff was retrieved from the black box of a plane last seen in the Bermuda Triangle many many years ago. Naofumi uses synths, traditional Japanese instruments, what sounds like a biscuit tin drumkit, and just about everything else he can get hold of to weave these idiosyncratic little soundtracks, most of which are purely instrumental.

After about three plays it really gets its claws into you. Very little actually sounds like it was intended to be heard by a quantity of ears running into double figures, and it's probably this singularity of purpose, coupled with the fact that Ishimaru seems to be coming from a distinctly non-Western tradition, that makes it so appealing. I can see why it's on vinyl - clear vinyl in a clear plastic sleeve by the way - rather than another medium. These tracks

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sound too substantial for the relatively transient nature of cassettes, and, if crudely digitised onto a glossy polycarbonate, the music would seem incongruous, like pie and mash served on antique bone china. This music feels like it needs the chunky tactile medium of vinyl with all those squiggly lumpy wee grooves.

There are two crap tracks I should mention, which I expect are included through some sort of contractual obligation if Old Gold's previous form is any indication. 'China Pong' and 'Eel Fishing in Moon Night' just sound like demos that The Residents might have sent to the BBC hoping to bag a commission to score the latest series of *Trumpton*. But with the cranky low resolution genius at work elsewhere, this pair of duds are easily overlooked.

I'm frankly amazed to find such a fine product from this label, and can't help wondering if it's actually some elaborate joke - Yximalloo never existed and the Sakura address is really a hamburger outlet that Ben Young came across on his travels. Although Old Gold are to be commended for their bravery in making some of their stuff available when they are based in a country where handguns are legal, I'm inclined to suspect this is the genuine article. Earlier Old Gold items like *How To Kick Yourself* are too rubbish to be forgiven, but for once it's hats off to Mr Young. In realising this he's gone done a good thing. Ben, this album is the way forward! I hope Ishimaru's still doing things because this is a cracker.

WAR ARROW

Additional note by Ed - Naofumi Ishimaru is of course a great friend of fellow nerd-rock genius, the American Jad Fair of Half Japanese, and in 1993 they released a joint effort CD Half Robot on Paperhouse Records (PAPCD15). The first of many we suspect.

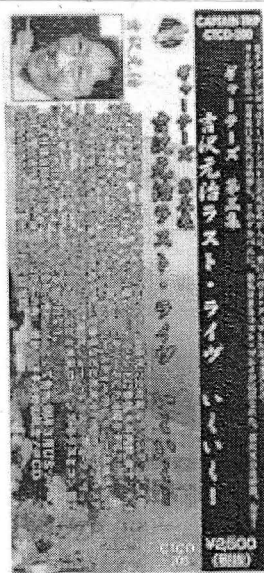
Tabata Brainsville

ELSIE + JACK RECORDINGS EAJ003 CD (1998)

Fine solo recordings comprise the debut solo CD from this great Japanese artiste, in places reminiscent of the solo work of Magical Power Mako - although not quite as wacked out as Mako, Tabata has his own very distinctive voice, and achieves moments of transcendent power and noise. This isn't bad going, considering that technically it's a step above a four-track bedroom recording - this was apparently 'recorded in a tiny room', using only electric guitars with occasional Casio keyboard. Tabata opens up that tiny imaginary space and, first and foremost, unleashes a huge, terrific sound when he lets his guitar roar. Imagine the power of a series of precision-target grenade explosions, converted into musical blasts. Tabata also manages fine pastoral acoustic guitar episodes, weird backward tape fragments, endless drone strummy jams, and inter-galactic electric solos as he paints his infinite vistas across the Milky Way. As you can guess from these pointers, he is (in places) highly influenced by German Kosmische music, in particular Can, Popol Vuh and Amon Düül, but the same could be said about Mako and Brast Burn, (see last

issue) who were also Japanese. Tabata adds great value to the artform of overdubbing, holding musical conversations with himself that are meaningful and not just another form of introverted doodling, and realising it all with a very compelling and incredible sound. Aided in this by Akira Yamanouchi who contributes feedback and guitar synth. Mitsuru Tabata is, perhaps surprisingly, a guitar wielding member of the blistering no-mercy band Zeni Geva. Richo Johnson: 'Tabata's work succeeds where others possessing similar aspirations merely, at best, limp along'. Highly recommended this...

ED PINSENT



Ground-Zero Last Concert

ALCOHOL ALGZ1CD CD (1999)

This might just be one of the most intense and important records released last year - and yet was anyone playing it during the Millennium celebrations? A more apt soundtrack for viewing fireworks, bathing in rivers of fire, or simply setting HM The Queen on fire with a cigarette lighter, I can't imagine - than this document of final live recordings from the mighty group led by Otomo Yoshihide, Ground-Zero. In this blistering barrage the large-scale, expensive, fish-biting combo from Japan land punch after punch on a hapless audience and realise the hopes and dreams of the far-flung Otomo and the eleven incredible musicians represented hereon - to say nothing of the great work of their sound system engineer, Kondo Yoshiaki. The first two tracks, 'Multi-Gravity 1' and 'Multi-Gravity 2', both answer each other in name, and in turn emphasise two of the primary musical interests of the grand-master furioso flash-mobile, guitarist, turntablist and composer Otomo. The first refers extensively to electronic music's history, the second celebrates free jazz. Both of those elemental forces - perhaps two of the most relevant developments in 20th century music - seared the mind of the young Otomo during his college days in Tokyo. Check out the interview this is for the stories of how hearing a Moog synth, and seeing Milford Graves perform, blew his mind with pockets of dynamite laced with nitro.

The third track, 'Consume-Red' live - I heard it at the LMC Festival some years ago - here links both of the above named musics along with samples, 'ethnic' sounds, and the tightest ensemble playing this side of a 1974 King Crimson lineup. The energy and control of this group simply surpass the bounds of possibility - never in your life could you even imagine such quality. This version of 'Consume Red' is by the far less dominated by the two drum kits than the original studio version, and pushes a terrifying array of great weird sounds to the front of the mix. And it's a mix of clarity. Far from being simply 'noise' as the heathen would have it, this music is simply very very loud music and there's a lot of it happening at once in the same place and very quickly. If that adds up to noise in your maths book, buy yourself a new calculator. The sheer density and weight of Ground-Zero's music - boasting as many strata as there are layers of stone between Queensland and the earth's core - has never been better managed and realised with the perfection it deserves than on this great record.

We'll miss Ground-Zero, won't we? Ground-Zero's 'project' - for want of a better word to describe this seismic earthquake in modern creative upheaval - genuinely did stretch the envelope of what we consider to be music, of what might be possible in sound. It was an heroic attempt to see how much could actually be piled into the furnace of a man's burning ears, how many super-talented (and high-salaried) players you could legitimately book onto one international stage before the world economy took a nose-dive, and how much the human frame could withstand before reaching meltdown or implosion. Far from any associations with excess - the excess of 1970s stadium rock, show-off soloing, or posturing ninnies swathed with dry ice and lasers - Ground-Zero offered us generosity, a horn of plenty. And now it is no longer shocking, but finally acceptable. The atomic meltdown it once seemed to be is now settling down into a shimmering mushroom cloud, revealing itself to be a concentrated mass of solid vitamin-rich music, a hazelnut in every bite! And, rest assured, records like this one will continue to have a 'half-life' of at least 10,000 years, like weapons-grade Plutonium.

And yet sensing perhaps the danger of burning himself out in the great conflagration he was setting his torch to, Otomo has since chosen a more contemplative path, putting silence at the centre of his new universe. The lengthy sleeve-note here dwells, not without a touch of sadness, on the prolonged and ritualistic dissolution of the Ground-Zero group. If your life was ever touched by their passing during their brief fling on this sorry globe, then count yourself a fortunate person. Now buy this as a souvenir and be glad.

ED PINSENT

Alcohol Records, PO Box 556, London SE5 0RL, UK



More music from Japan in the ATOMS OF PURE NOISE section

Environmental and Field Recordings



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EERIE VIBRATING MAGNETIC WAVES =====

SET YOUR HOPES BY A STARLIT SKY =====

SOUNDSCAPES =====

FIREWORKS =====

Laminar

Ante-Chamber

USA, SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS SOL 92 CD (1999)

Kicks off with an impressive start in the opening tracks - or 'Sectors' as this particular package would have it. It succeeds in evoking the roaring rush of a hurricane, the salty blast of a storm at sea, and a raging bonfire out in the woods at dawn. When the Ante-Chamber is functioning on full powers, it is as effective as a science-fiction teleportation device, and it can whisk away the listener to a savage world devoid of any human life. Imagine...alone against the elements, you turn your flinty axe towards the unknown and set your hopes by a starlit sky. However, by about the fifth or sixth 'Sector' of this particular virtual theme park ride, the overpowering force of the sound has diminished somewhat, and the Ante-Chamber only delivers a tasteful Ambient surrounding which is more fit for watching your goldfish as they dart back and forth across the tank.

Laminar is we suspect a solo turn named Fred, working out of New York in the USA; there's some allusion to his all-new acoustic working methods which enable him to magnify microscopic sound effects to an extreme degree. I would like to say that I too have borne witness to 'the individual grains of pollen' of which the press release boasts, but I'm still trying to locate those particles in amongst the general hurly-burly.

ED PINSENT



Mnortham

Many Rivers Move Along The Surface of The Magnet

NETHERLANDS, ERS 12/02 LP (1999)

In this early solo recording from 1995-1996, Mnortham (ie Michael Northam) has barely intervened in the forces of nature other than to construct his home-made sound devices out of wire and have them installed with great care in a studio environment. This mini-LP documents some of the strange goings-on caused by 'the earth's magnetic blood flow' as it passes over and under the sculptures. With one side of extremely powerful monotonous humming and another side of mostly scraping and grinding noises similar to David Jackman's Organum workouts, you know you're in for a good time. Mnortham's Nagle Place studio is based in Seattle, from which vantage point he is able to physically repel the bodies of any remaining Nirvana sound-alike bands still dwelling in that town,

using the eerie vibrating magnetic waves from his wiry works. At the very least, he should be able to cause permanent damage to their amplifier transistors so they won't ever tour again. If you like this, why not check out his 1997 CD *The Stomach of The Sky* on Staalplaat? And be sure to let me know if it's any good.

ED PINSENT



Hands To

Egress / Tsii'edo'a'ti (The Wood That Sings)

USA, ANOMALOUS RECORDS GO 47 VINYL LP (ND)

Cactus music rocks! This LP wins the silver cup for the most unusual environmental recording in this section, because it's comprised of 'short songs played entirely on the remains of dead cactus found in the desert outside Tucson Arizona'. I freely give my endorsement to anyone who tries to break away from the shackles of recording-studio based music, so I naturally welcome this adventure; anyone who journeys out there into a National Park with his contact microphones and makes a friend of the cacti is a sure-fire winner in my book. What's more this LP is filled with splendid sounds and music, too. Well, there will be a few diehards who beg to differ; although there are some actual primitive tunes near the end of side two, it's mainly rather abstract listening. These musical portions, it turns out, are made from improvised violins and drum instruments constructed entirely out of dead cacti - including most memorably, an 'acoustic theremin' made from a

cactus stalk and a dowel. There's an immediate sense of ancient-ness that hits you with these basic tunes; I seem to hear giant cactus spines being plucked with as much solemnity as any 100 year-old Japanese kyoto player would muster.

However, the remainder of the LP is delightfully atmospheric open-air material, richly evoked by the photographs hand-glued to the master bag sleeve (when did you last see a sky so vividly blue?) This environmental record, recorded in early 1996, is

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chiefly made up of totally non-musical scrapes, buffetings, whops and whaps, produced as the artist applies his percussive and scraping actions to whatever fallen giants of nature he might encounter on his travels. If this is starting to sound a bit like the exploits of Carlos Castaneda, or Captain Beefheart living in the Mojave, then I suspect you're on the right track. It's the music of isolated loners, filled with the fire and rugged pioneer spirit that we thought had all but vanished from the wild frontier.

Hands To is Jeph Jerman, also known as the drummer in a free noise collective called Blowhole. His effort isn't that far away from that of Mnortham (see above), whom he namechecks as a good buddy on the liner notes. As to the non-musicalness of it, I for one am reminded of Lucas Abela's car-music record, *Music To Drive By*, which I keep wittering on about (see issue 6), a blindingly excellent soft-noise record which was created from pure urban serendipity. But in a way that record ended up saying something about decay, about modern urban death manifested through metal fatigue. This *Egress* record by contrast is an entirely life-affirming statement - even if the starring players, the cacti, are empty shells of their former selves - and it does it in a way that is genuinely environmentally friendly - and unpretentious. As to that I would never associate Mr Hands To with bonkers tree-worshipping types who perform inane mourning ceremonies at the death of one poor redwood at the hands of a zealous lumberjack. Rather, this record is nominated for my personal 'Green Globe' prize, for delivering a touching and lasting artistic statement about the state of the earth's topography today.

ED PINSENT

*Animist Recording, PO Box
15753, Seattle WA 98145,
USA*

Jazzkammer

Timex

SWEDEN, RUNE
GRAMMOFON RCD 2014 CD
(1999)

The environmental source recordings are just one ingredient in the casserole of this fine experimental compositional disc, but as it's their evocative use of street noises and firework sounds that have stayed with me for so long, I choose this environmental handle for the present time. John Hegre and Lasse Marhaug have pieced together an exhilarating and dynamic electro-acoustic noise-a-thon inside a punchy eight-track workout that's just perfect clocking in at around 40 minutes, the old 'LP' length. It should enhance and furnish any drab living environment with its roaring, sizzling blasts and fizzles. Crackling records on a wind-up Victrola surrounded by a blizzard of snow. A nightmare street scene replete with dayglo plastic vest-wearing headhoppers, illegal drugs and flashes of House music from car stereo systems. And fireworks. The sheer delight in layering strange sounds has rarely sounded so fresh, as though the creators actually had fun - you all remember that? - as if they enjoyed creating and listening to their own experiments, rather than simply flinging together a rag-bag of incongruous and silly ill-fitting noises reclaimed from a dustbin outside Wardour Street. Yes, unlike many dingbats who insist on their 'experimental' credentials without serving any time to earn them, Jazzkammer exhibit a true dedication to their craft, yet never once overplay the fetishism-of-technology card. I'm assuming of course that these crunchy popcorn abstract noise backdrops have been generated using digital technology, but I'm usually wrong in these areas. The fifth-dimensional sound whirlpool tells stories of sorts; the narrative hints and itches in this work reflect the cinema/theatre backgrounds of both creators. John Hegre's 15-year career embraces sound design, music for theatre, improvised guitar playing and trip-hop music with Kaptein Kaliber. Lasse Marhaug used to play in Origami Replika, worked on soundtracks, and after 10 years of experimental noise releases on cassettes and records, now runs the ultra-trendoid label Jazzassin Records. One word - just in case any of the above has led you to expect a user-friendly beat-laden opus, check into another hotel - because this is genuine modern composition, folks!

ED PINSENT

www.rune Grammofon.com

Climax Golden Twins

Climax Golden Twins

USA, FIRE BREATHING TURTLE NO
NUMBER CD (ND)

A very odd collection of field recordings we suspect, although not wholly undoctored and with the odd bit of tweaking thrown in. It's a modern music concrète mix comprising real travelogue stuff, gathered from trips to exotic locations such as China, Mexico, Nepal, Israel and elsewhere. Most of it's presented pretty stark and in-the-raw, which means we get enchanting local music thrown in with the cries of street-urchins, local wildlife (mainly crickets and birds), atmospheric recordings from temples and hotels, and even a man snoring. In all a highly beguiling mix of spoken word, nature sounds, and music. The local music portions you understand are emphatically NOT documentary recordings - a

World Music LP this ain't! - rather they are just one more contribution to the overall ambience. This makes the enterprise far more genuine somehow - an aural picture postcard from a foreign land, but enriched with a palpable sense of the alien-ness of foreign culture which comes over so strongly you can taste it like a mouthful of pungent exotic spice.

This comes in a splendid white card sleeve stamped in foil with a Persian-type motif. Little is known of the 'Twins' except this is produced by Scott Colburn, the same guy who works with Sun City Girls. And they apparently share the same interest in immersing themselves in the weirdness of foreign countries; Rick Bishop of the Girls has recently written (in *Halana* magazine) an astonishing article compiling anecdotes from his frequent trips to the more remote parts of India. He is proud of his adventurous spirit which compels him to depart far away from the well-travelled tourist parts of foreign lands, and as a result his trips abroad beat yours and mine any day - he fetches back unforgettable images, extremely strange experiences and near-dangerous scrapes with the locals. And he's a better man because of it, no doubt. On one occasion he

appears to have literally saved his own life through playing his guitar!

ED PINSENT



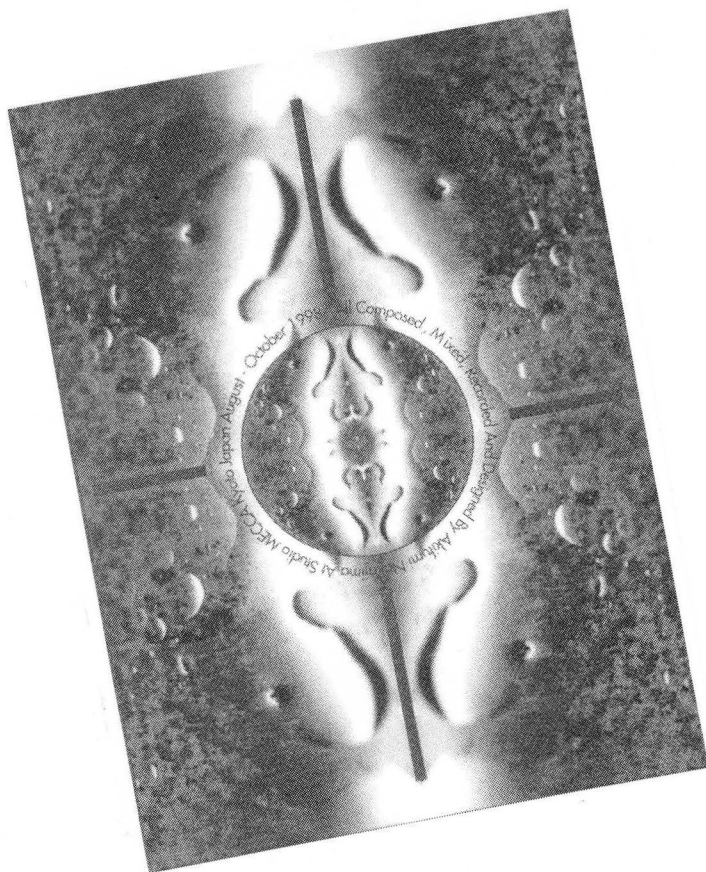
Various Artists

Soundscapes be)for(e 2000

NETHERLANDS, SSCD 002A-B 2 X CD

This is a compilation of five prize-winning submissions for a music festival in Amsterdam of the same name, and despite its unprepossessing sleeve art (like something for a Playstation game you wouldn't even give to your hated 5 year-old nephew) and the dubious boast in the liner notes that 'new music is about to reveal its secrets', it's very good - a very approachable and useful set of new music. Five long tracks, spread over the

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luxuriant territory of a double CD. Not exclusively field recordings, but this is what dominates - and there are some real favourites here, including farm animals, children singing, voices in exotic foreign languages, cars going by on a motorway, falling rain (my personal favourite! Can't seem to get enough of it!), ambient city noises, and what have you. Ever since I first heard the great Michael Prime recording and processing the sounds of an English village I've been a sucker for anyone who dares to frame the natural sounds of everyday life using the medium of the tape recorder. I'm not fully persuaded by that often-heard glib pronouncement that 'everything' is acceptable as music, because it takes real observational skills (if an ear can be said to be observant) to discover and select those sounds in the first place, and even more art is involved in editing them together to form statements as interesting and involving as these particular scapes. Yes, indeed...another noticeable advance is how much better is the technology available for doing it these days. When you hear those cars rushing by on the motorway, brother, you better jump out of the way as they speed past you from speaker to speaker. Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of The Moon* was never like this...Represented hereon - Eric La Casa, Sibylle Pomorin, Karel von Kleist, Robert Iolini with Phillip Ma, and Francisco López with a characteristically mind-expanding masterpiece - a mere 28 minute excerpt from a longer work called 'La Selva'. For more of his exceptional work, read the section on Very Special Nothing Music.

ED PINSENT



Aube

Ricochetentrance

ITALY, LUNAR L199904 CD (1999)

Another release from the very prolific Akifume Nakajima, operating out of his Mecca Studio in Kyoto. This one's on an environmental-ish theme, with all sounds originated from water. This arrived within days of considering that chance remark from Howard the sculptor, who in 1981 dismissed my growing interest in avant-garde cinema by comparing that sort of dull, repetitive image-making to the sound of a dripping tap. (See the VSNM section for this same anecdote). So along comes this,

effectively a dripping tap record. You know, I should be careful what I write - it may come true.

After that build-up I wish I could tell you how much I'm enjoying this release. I'm not. It doesn't quite live up to its claim to be 'minimalist trance music', because there's simply not enough happening to engage the interest at all. I sometimes have to wonder about this Aube fellow, who has built up quite a reputation mainly through sticking to his gimmick of only working at one sound-source per release. But all he's done here is take boring water sounds, put on bits of echo, make tape loops, and overdub everything. Net result - watery sounds resembling a malfunctioning beatbox. Never once does it transcend this method, or its source, to turn into a species of art - or even something like listenable music.

I was about to tell you the wonderful package ← is at least a redeeming feature. In fact, it's as pretentious as the music on offer this time - a wraparound outsize cover printed on art paper, crediting Stefano Gentle with 'Original Photographs of The Water'. I mean, how precious can you get? This nonsense is allegedly 'limited' to 1000 copies - meaning there'll be 998 of the stupid things stuck in a warehouse for the next five years. Unless they suffer rain damage. Once your unsold stock gets waterlogged, pal, you'll come to understanding the real meaning of water. Well listeners, if you decide to buy this - don't play it at a time when you're bursting for a piss, whatever you do!

ED PINSENT



YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY EXPERTS
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P©PULAR CULTURE, SEX, RELIGI©N...

People Like Us interview

**People Like Us
prefers to remain
the Anonymous
Artiste**



This interview was conducted by e-mail in the first week of December 1999.

EP = Ed Pinsent (The Sound Projector)

PLU = People Like Us

EP Despite its being deleted I managed to find a copy of your Lowest Common Dominator the other day. Very fine record.

PLU Thank you. That was my first full length release. From 1993. Was done on an Amiga 500 computer with an £26 8-bit cartridge sampler that you would plug into the back of the computer keyboard! Not that I'm a techno-nerd or anything, but I think that's lo-fi! That's the album where I didn't put any titles for tracks because I was on an extreme about not wanting textual documentation for music that should speak without words.

EP Also I see from the Musique Korrekt 'newsletter' that you're leaving the Staalplaat label?

PLU Yes. I left a while back but had to see the remix project through with them. Am still with Soleilmoon though. Also Hot Air, am doing my new album with them, it's going to be out once the art work's done.

EP An essay question, first... Your work reminds me of two of my favourite (visual) collage artists, John Heartfield and Max Ernst. So, are there any real parallels?

PLU Collage has always been my way of looking at the world and it was through photographic collage that I discovered working with video, film and then sound. It is the most important thing to me to be interpreted on as many levels as one can comprehend, and what better way than layering.

EP Heartfield, I think, deployed quite shocking imagery (shocking at the time, at any rate) with a socio-political aim in mind, to rouse an apathetic populace from their torpor and wake up to the shocking truths around them. But then, he lived in pretty interesting times - and mass communications weren't quite as ubiquitous as they are now, so it was harder to get to the truth.

PLU Yes, I'm aware of this work and find it very interesting. Of course I cannot fully comprehend what it must have been like to comment in his time, but understand that if you take imagery intended for one thing and then put it next to something else that you are sometimes mixing ingredients for a cocktail bomb. This is my way of working too. The extreme reactions from a mass, or even a big room of people may be far beyond what the artist ever expected. This is because the artist is immersed deeply within the foundations of his/her work and communicating with the subject matter, whereas the outsider is introduced primarily by its crudest or most obvious elements within their sphere of understanding. And their understanding of any symbolism may come from sensationalist or twisted sources. So if you show most people a swastika they will not only say nazi, but they will say YOU are a nazi. If you show it to an occultist or Buddhist you'll get something completely different. But then if you show an occultist or Buddhist to a reactionary you'll once again get something different! First you label, then you pin it somewhere. So you may as well do what you like.

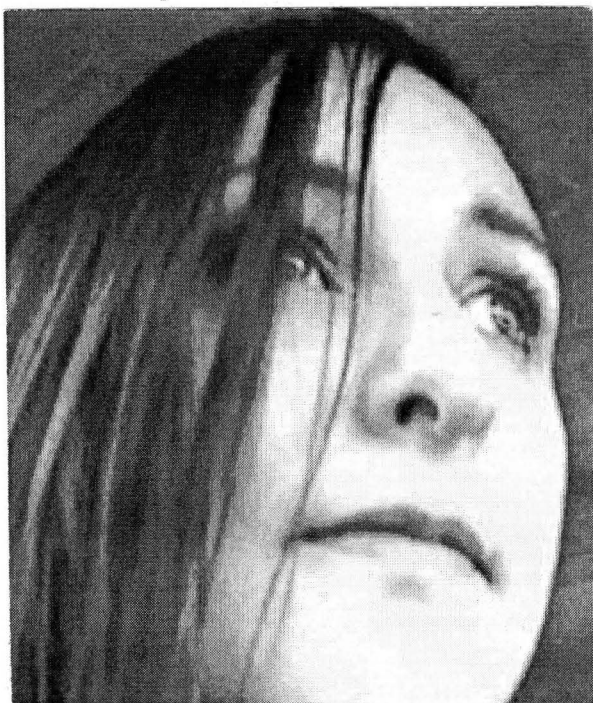
EP Max Ernst was responsible for creating some astounding images in his collage books such as A Week of Kindness and

The Hundred Headless Women. Here he took 19th century engravings which were potentially quite inert and innocent, yet through strong juxtapositions he made oneiric and sexually charged pictures. And there was a double-whammy effect to that, because he used imagery familiar to his own immediate generation, thus intending to unsettle the cosy belief-systems of Mum and Dad. For instance, consider your own use of easy-listening LPs. Aren't these like 'Mum and Dad' music? And the found voices, especially from Radio 4 -intended to be reassuring and cosy, you make them into something quite different.

PLU Yes, very nice. What's the best way to provoke? With what we all have in common. Upbringing, popular culture, sex, religion. All are bigger than the individual and all are things we struggle with. Max Ernst knew the power of digging deeper into the hole of taboos, the unspoken. He knew that

you have to seduce with the familiar in order to open people up. Otherwise you alienate people before you've got their foot in the door! That's my belief too. Although I don't altogether know what to do with people once they're IN the door I know that you have to find a common source of interest. Yes, my use of 'Mum and Dad' and the other familiar cosy things is definitely to do with seducing the listener enough to pay attention. It is also a bit of a Zen way of working. To attain the awe of the audience is half the battle. You can do it by confusion or provocation amongst other things.

EP Another essay question, a bit more provocative. I'm not against you, but let's probe this area a bit...How effective can this form of subversion be; what is the intended audience; can it really work on them? For instance, ever since I was an art student onwards I've come across dozens of examples of my peers taking great delight in sneering at popular imagery of the past. I'm a big comics



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fan, and have met loads of civilians who sneer at the creaky old adverts from the 1950s. Actually some of them are downright weird! Isn't this just a kind of lazy smugness on our part? The underlying implication is that 'we' somehow know better than 'they' did in the past, we are more emancipated than the previous generation. I feel sure this could translate into 'People Like Us Hate People Like You'. It must be something you have thought about....

PLU I understand what you're saying. I see a certain arrogance in taking the mickey out of things and it's often a case of choosing easy targets for an easy audience. Or rather, it's art for the establishment. You even get established experimental! We are making work for our own kind, aren't we? Whether that be our own tiny circle of friends or our own massive generation. No one makes work for those that they think wouldn't understand or couldn't mirror unless they are trying to provoke a reaction. I believe that humour is one of the few areas of life where you should be allowed to do exactly what you want, nothing is sacred. That is maybe why it is so attractive to me. However, just because this is the case it doesn't mean that I don't respect the content that I am manipulating. When I play with BBC voices and radio callers I am to an extent paying homage to the broadcast medium. I don't hate these people, I can't work with that which I don't feel warm with. I owe them a great deal for inspiring my work! Back to what the intended audience may be - so long as you feel that within yourself you're moving and experiencing new things and people seem to be translating that then the target audience would be any inquisitive person on the planet.

For readers who don't know my work - my previous album (from 1997) was called *People Like Us Hate People Like You*. With a name like *People Like Us*, and being someone who makes titles and music out of puns, it was inevitable! My material is very crude at times and yes, primitive. I wasn't really making a statement that I hate 'people', I don't any more than I love them! If I was then I was sending myself up to a certain extent. I then named the Remix CD *Hate People Like Us* because it contains

'I can buy into comfort and security but at the same time cannot feel I can trust such a thing because it makes you shut down. Then you're open wide.'

remixes of *Hate People Like You* and contains people like 'us'! Also, on a more personal and subconscious level it could be said that such if you engage in a duality situation of being part of any group of people, in any box, you eventually turn on your own kind and yourself. Having said that, I am an elitist. Or rather, I don't see that democracy makes good art.

EP Another instance, again an art student thing, oh the number of people who used Ronald Reagan movie posters from his Hollywood past in order to make some 'ironic' point about his being a war-mongering President! At least, that's how we young anti-Nuclear weapons protesters liked to see it...simply pick a picture of Reagan dressed as a cowboy from some Western potboiler, stick a nuclear explosion behind it and voila! Instant social commentary...I think what I disliked here was the laziness, and commonplace use of a banal idea. (You're better than that though).

PLU Yes, we all start with the most obvious thought but hopefully with a little persistence

can start digging deeper for more obscure angles to take on any situation. Of course there is irony in my work, but a lot of the time I am a victim of my own irony, that is why I continue to work with such a thread because it moves, and where there is movement there are ideas. Many a time I've

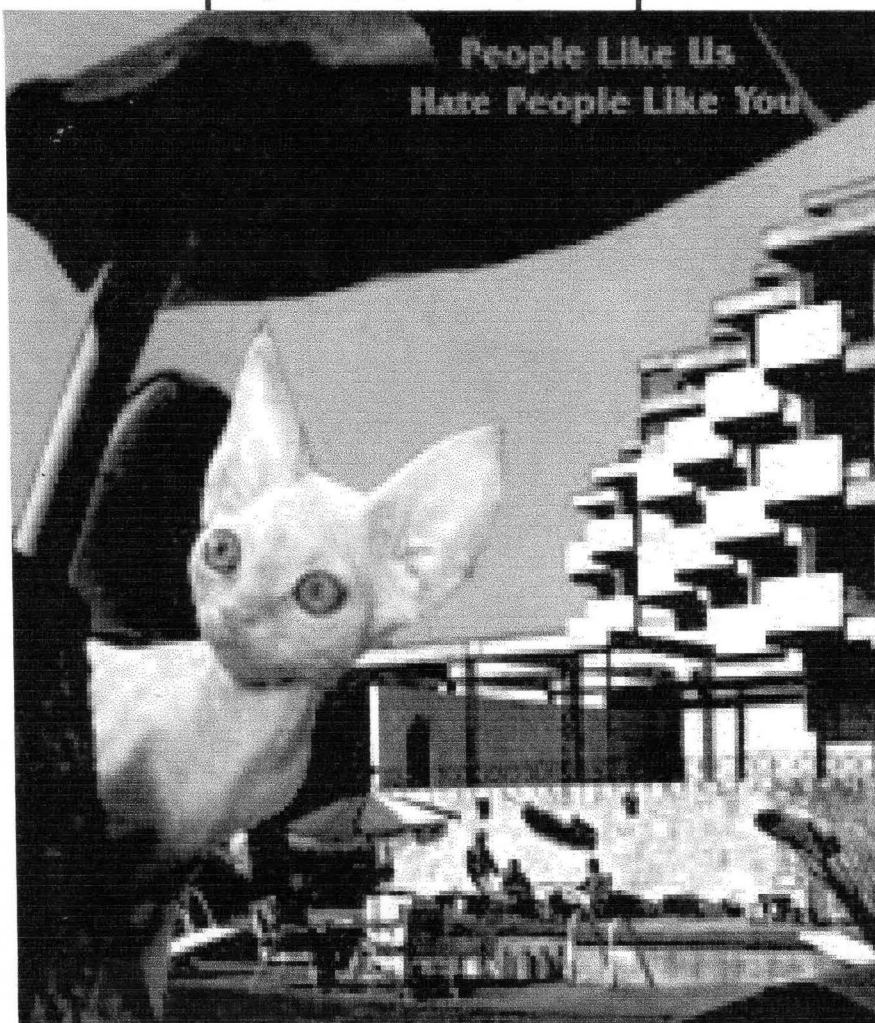
liked something because it is bad, because it lacks taste... because it makes me laugh, whatever. But any artist will say that once they have sat with that material for a week and ploughed over and through it, eaten it and regurgitated it, they no longer find the initial attraction appeals at all, let alone find it remotely hilarious. But that makes it all the more funny! No wonder not many artists work with humour!

So you may well take Clinton holding a book and stick a woman on the cover with her tits out, and that's a start. But then the test is whether to leave it at that or immerse yourself in every possible angle of what you could do to it after that. Someone might find a crude statement banal, but it is only because it is such statements that get picked up on and used so many times. I find questions far more interesting than answers. I don't think I have any particular statement to make in my work. If I want to talk, I'll do interviews. The music should speak for itself, and besides, I'm a lousy tour guide. Most people would sooner go around the Ronald Reagan Roundabout har-harring forever than actually

choosing a junction and bugging off. And art college is the most uninspiring place on earth to make art. I used to have to go home before I could do anything.

EP How much tweaking do you really have to do to your found sources to achieve the desired effect?

PLU I don't follow the same method for each piece. It might be easier to work that way, with a formula, but I do try to see every new piece as a blank page. Time-wise, the spoken word manipulations take the longest because the timing and editing has to be so precise for the slapstick to work. But for other pieces it is simply a case of finding two elements



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that work - more like being a DJ than a composer.

EP I recently snagged a copy of the first Negativland LP. For the cover they've clipped and pasted old adverts from a 1950s family magazine, with absolutely no intervention or collage whatsoever. In the context of the record, the pictures are satires of themselves already - without their having to call attention to it.

PLU Each cover was done by hand, each different. That is a good album. Very naive - that's a compliment by the way. Exploring rather than knowing. My first album was done meticulously too - 100 LPs - a split release with Abraxas. We got the artwork done on nice paper at the photocopy shop, when we got the labels done I had to cut all the holes out myself. But this was all because we had no idea how to do it any other way. Maybe that was part of the case with Mark Hosler and Co too.

EP Do you value humour above shock or surrealism?

PLU I'd say that humour and shock are reactions to surrealism. I value the surrealist viewpoint above just about anything that I could possibly think of.

EP Despite all the aural tripwires and booby-traps, there seems to be a real fun, user-friendly element to the work - and lots of lush surfaces. Though you get compared to John Oswald and Negativland a lot, those guys seem quite severe in comparison. And they're didactic - 'I'm telling you something, and it's for your own good, understand?'

PLU I use techniques, found sound and humour, as do John Oswald and Negativland for sure. Shove me in that box. My work is more consistently idiotic and pointless. Of course I have strong opinions about copyright and materialistic/spiritual issues, but they aren't really the message. Hopefully when you look into my work you see what you are as much as what I am. I don't want to tell stories that are unambiguous because then the story would end there. Ambiguity is my goal, yes! Another thing - I am very British, and dare I say, female. Although I don't think being female makes much difference apart from the occasional bout of positive discrimination. A lot of people think that **PLU** is a bunch of blokes, which is great!

EP Are the, erm, narrative ideas more important than the sound-world qualities?

PLU The narrative is treated like music if possible. Rhythms and harmonies within the words are extended and played upon, although with more detail. You have to be more anal about the text!

EP I LOVE the disorienting effects you create, and they're not just through sudden edits and juxtaposition. The sound makes me feel like I'm dreaming, the internal logic is delightfully inexplicable.

PLU That's what I want. I want people to surf statically on my sounds, tripping over but never moving forward! I love to work with radio because it is a passive medium in a way. You just switch on and listen. You switch off and listen! It is very funny to play people my radio cut ups and watch their eyes glaze over as if they are listening to a normal unadulterated broadcast. And then their eyes light up when they suddenly hear all the

words turn into the most confusing sentences and slurring and looping. It's such a strong medium, so hypnotic. I would like to do the same with TV at some point but TV is less subtle, and the ears are more sensitive than the eyes because you can't look away.

EP The only record that comes close in the same way is Revolutionary Pekinese Opera by Ground-Zero.

PLU I'm listening to this now, and it's like live rebirthing, amazingly energetic and funny. I can only hope that I could be like this. Must say that I feel really in tune with the live feel of this recording and when listen to the 'live' (ie in my house but not post-edited) recordings that I've made I know there is a similar vitality. I think what he does is maybe more aggressive, but actually no. It's just got more screaming on it!

EP I feel fairly sure in assuming that Otomo simply likes stringing strange sounds together, above any narrative content. You, on the other hand, seem a bit more involved with the content. Is that true?

PLU I am always being pulled back and forth. One part of me wants to tell stories, have narrative, but the other more impulsive side says that all words are just sounds. Don Joyce said to me that one source is as good as the next, and I do understand what he means. I love the mundane, the boring, morose. And when I hear all those screams on the Ground-Zero recording I know how he feels, I think. There is also a track on *Organ Transplants* by Stock, Hausen and Walkman where a really friendly tune is playing and they're adding short bursts of maniacal screaming. It's brilliant.

I love the way that dealing with uncomfortable material invokes movement - rebellion. I am inspired to change that which stifles me. But at the same time I appreciate the comfort that a late night radio broadcast brings and tune in myself, but partly because it is funny hearing people talking about things that really aren't very interesting at all. See, this is what I mean about pushing and pulling all the time when I compose. One side wants to kill, the other side wants to nurture! I can buy into comfort and security but at the same time cannot feel I can trust such a thing because it makes you shut down. Then you're open wide.

EP How does your work differ when performed in a live context? How do people react? Has anyone ever been shocked, provoked?

PLU I used to DJ - although I felt that it was 'live' because of the extent of the collage making that was taking place - and also I felt that just because you use a DJ's tools you may not fit into the DJ definition, whatever that may be. But I grew tired of using record decks and CD players because I wanted to be presenting sounds that had been manipulated further by myself. Now I use CD-Rs and MiniDiscs of my own work and take apart my compositions and remix myself in a live situation. Video is a big part of my work too - I use found film footage transferred to video and edit it much in the way that I do with sound collage. The video provides that audio and visual accompaniment and sometimes dialogue for my performances.

I'd say I've been shocked/provoked and so have the audiences. More so when I've DJ-ed

because there is more of an expectation that if you DJ that you are basically a slave to the audience and are answerable to their every whim. Disgusting! Certainly when I've DJ-ed people have queued up to complain and pick verbal fights with me, people have been thrown out for getting so aggressive. In turn I get provoked and just do more - feeling justified for annoying them! This is when I've played in the 'wrong' bars. It could be said that these are exactly the right places to play difficult music. These days I make sure people know I am not going to 'DJ'. I tell the organisers that I'm going to do a live set, and generally won't do it unless it's in a cinema or seated type of space, or that I know it is an art venue rather than techno (ie tech-no-notice) environment. I've had enough of that.

But I'm still searching for the best way to work in a live situation. I love to play live with other people and have enjoyed many collaborations with my friends in America such as The Jet Black Hair People and Wobbly. Improvising with them has produced the most amazing moments and real intuitive working. There has been nothing like it. But at the same time there is a part of me that likes to work alone, but that's more of a studio thing.

EP Hate People Like Us seems a very sympatico collaboration. Are all the remixers friends, people you've worked with? How long did it take to put together? Speaking of friends and collaborators, has your work evolved in isolation, or are there any personal influences?

PLU I chose the artists for the CD because I think remix projects are often rather boring and the same people get chosen all of the time. Most of the people that I chose are friends or people who have shown enthusiasm. I'm proud and flattered that this has come together, even though the project took two and a half years. It drove us mad. I started to wonder at times if the project was ever going to end, and in fact the 2 x CD was pressed but is not going to be repressed or sold by Staalplaat. However, the Soleilmoon 1 x CD is doing well and we've got lots of good publicity for it, am going to be Band of the Week in *Alternative Press* shortly, ha! My work is always a reflection of the people that I've seen and the places I've been to. But I generally am alone when I make the music. So it's both.

EP 'Shitcake' - didn't realise until I saw the title that there was a turd on the birthday cake! Doesn't this image sum up something about your work, the thrilling combination of beauty with ugliness, often in the same bite of the cake. Some of your droney loopings are as evocative and powerful as any record by say Amon Düül or Popol Vuh, yet you're frequently undercutting it with trash, vulgarity and weird foreign elements.

PLU That's funny, you blocked it out! A number of people didn't notice the natural additive at first, actually. So do you want to know if it's a real turd? Believe it or not I had a vision for that CD cover! In Spring 1998 I had an operation after breaking my leg. When I came round I was holding a plastic bag with my metal screws and a long pole in it and thought of a satin cushion with a shit on it surrounded by dry ice. Modified the idea slightly, bought the cake, decorated it and

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then acquired the aforementioned stool at great cost.

You're spot on about the combination idea. Only with bright light can you see shadows. It is what lies on the periphery that appeals to me, I've never been interested in the main stream, even if it's good. To embrace the polarity and extremes of life may bring hope of understanding this so that it is not so extreme any more. But also, I'd say that the shit on a cake is a defiant two fingers up, just for the hell of it.



PEOPLE LIKE US DISCOGRAPHY

Another Kind Of Humor Another Kind Of Murder (Split With Abraxas)

WORLD SERPENT GBCD1 (CD) 1992*

Lowest Common

Dominator

STAALPLAAT STCD079 (CD) 1994*

It's Terrific!

STAALPLAAT (DAT) 1994*

Guide To Broadcasting

STAALPLAAT STMDCD2 (3" CD) 1994*

Beware The Whim Reaper

STAALPLAAT STCD 101 (CD) 1996*

Jumble Massive

SOLEILMOON SOLV005 (LP) 1996*

File Under Easy / Sleazy

Listening (Split With

Sniper)

KLEPTONES 1 (LP) 1996*

Lassie House

STAALPLAAT STPLUPOO1 (10") 1997*

Blundersonix / Special

Mix (Split With TFU)

KLEPTONES 2 (LP) 1997 *

People Like Us And

Sniper Play The Three Djs

Of The Apocalypse (With

Sniper)

KLEPTONES 4 (LP) 1997*

Hate People Like You

STAALPLAAT STCD 119 (CD) 1997*

People Like Us Meet The

Jet Black Hair People in

Concert

AUDIOVIEW (CD) JULY 1999

Hate People Like Us

(Remix Of PLU By 23 Other Artists)

SOLEILMOON STAALPLAAT

(1 & 2 CD) AUGUST 1999

The Thermos Explorer

HOT AIR (CD/LP) JANUARY 2000



CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMPILATIONS



And The Wolves...

COLD SPRING (AS THE PLEASE DISEASE) (LP) 1990*

Sonderangebot

STAALPLAAT/DISCORDIA 12505 (CD) 1996*

The Soundworks Exchange 2

SOUND WORK RECORDINGS

SWRCD2 (CD) 1996

Occupied Territories

STAALPLAAT STCD110 (CD) 1996*

Antiphony

ASH INTERNATIONAL ASH 3.4 (CD) 1996

The Answering Machine Solution

STAALPLAAT STCD100 (CD) 1997*

Subraum (#9)

MAGAZINE AND 7" VINYL 1997

The Sound Of Music

STAALPLAAT LIMITED EDITION PROMO (3" CD) 1998

I'm So Bored With The USA

DISKONO 002 (LP) 1998

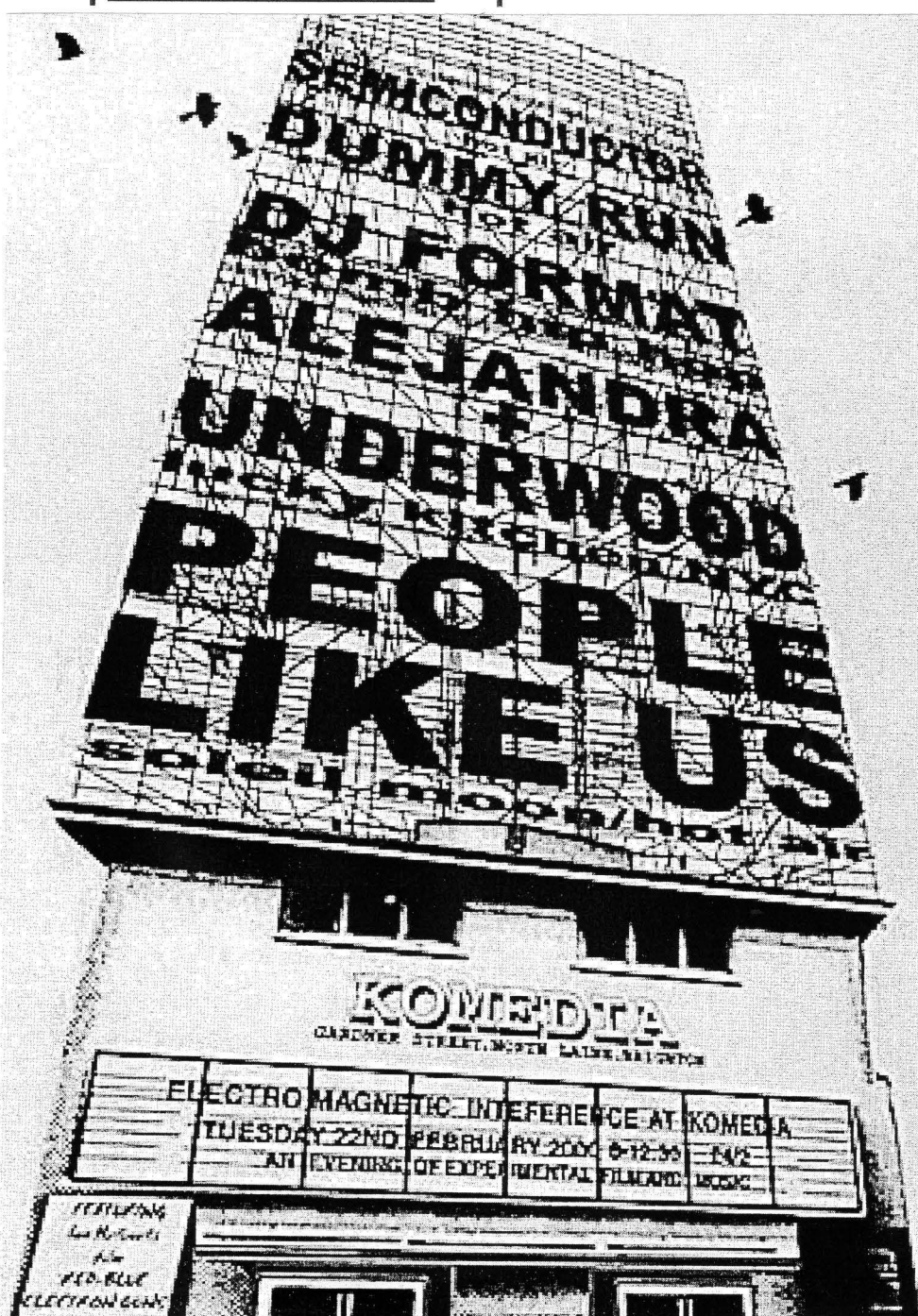
Stuffing V/Vm (7") 1998*

RRR500 RRR (LP) 1998

The Female Of The Species

LAW & AUDER (2CD) 1999

* = Deleted



very special
NOTHING
music

**An Introduction to VSNM
by Ed Pinsent**

THE WORLD HAS QUICKLY become a fairly unbearable and threatening zone, no matter where you try and carve a living, buy a loaf of good bread, or even simply make it to the end of the street with all four limbs still intact. Science fiction movies, even the harshly dystopian ones like *Toy Story 2*, have never really gone far enough in their biting satire of the insanities and excesses of modern man. Reality far surpasses even the most nightmare-wracked imaginative visions, and even a latterday Jonathan Swift would be hard-pressed to account for the absurd follies around him, should he suddenly rematerialise in the middle of Leicester Square one Friday night.

But it's not all gloom, doom, and a stale crumpet on your tea-tray. These strange days have seen the ascendancy of some brilliant composers - roughly located in the field of minimal, electro-acoustic music - whose interventions into our filthy globe, so overpacked with unnecessary NOISE - interventions, I say, of extremely quiet sound sources which are so imperceptible that we are able to enjoy, in great quantities, what I now refer to as Very Special Nothing Music, or VSNM. Here be records that are so MINIMAL they carry no name, no pictures, no handle...nobody created them, they just arrived one day like little alien spaceships landing from another world...they are impossible to find, to buy, or even to own...some are only rumoured to exist, others may only be the inventions of some japester independent record label. And at least one of the records described below turns you into a glass statue instantly, as soon as you listen to it - or even think about it.

Should you manage to separate your ears from the TV speaker and bring them instead into close contact with a piece of 'VSNM', the sheer emptiness that awaits you is quite exhilarating. Why, you could put a tape headcleaner into your deck and get more 'events' than playing a single one of these elusive silver demons, some of which are absolute black holes of nothingness. The interesting thing you'll find - if you managed to collect and listen to all of the examples I have gathered below - is the astounding range of VARIATION you can perceive within so-called nothingness. At first you may find the work dull, then impossibly dull; then you may find yourself on the other side of dullness, in a state of total stupefaction. (In saying this, I'm paraphrasing an art critic writing in support of the tedious minimal lines of that great gallery artist Sol Lewitt). I've stated before how I believe that, like insurance companies, not all blank

canvasses are the same; those layers of Titanium White daubed by a flat-ended hogshair brush can become a coloured tapestry as rich as Joseph's coat of long sleeves, if you'll only take the time to look. And take the time to be carried out of the art gallery on a stretcher, in a catatonic trance.

In listening to 'Nothing' music, the analogy I sometimes fall back on is...breathing. Breathing air isn't exactly doing 'nothing', but maybe it can come pretty close. Especially if you work in the Hackney area. Now think of the difference between a lungfull of exhaust fumes on the street, and breathing in the frosty air on top of a mountain. Trying to inhale when the wind is blowing in your face. Try breathing underwater. Try breathing with your nose and mouth stopped up with gobbets of wax. Not so easy, is it? Now stop all these silly experiments, and make room in your life for the VERY SPECIAL NOTHING MUSIC...because it might just be the future, tomorrow's past available today! We can graft the ears of a Beethoven onto the body of a dog!



**Francisco López
Untitled 1993**

STAALPLAAT STCD037 CD (1999)

**Francisco López
Untitled 74**

USA, TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS TC 43 CD (1997)

**Francisco López
Untitled #91**

USA, EDITION...IV CD (1999)

Here are three separate releases from one of the more notorious ultra-minimal electronicists of our day. *Untitled 1993* is a great selection of live performances with such collaborators as Michael Northam, Steve Peters, Zan Hoffman and others. In live performance, López may often wear a blindfold at the mixing desk, the better to focus his mind and direct his hearing into the solid pulsing drones that he looses into the world. The audience is often asked to join in and also wear a blindfold; more obstinate audience members may even be asked to wear a gag, get tied to their seat, or simply asked to leave.

The listener, swathed in this constant rumbling, will be pushed into an interior landscape and the music will take its full effect. If you don't dare submit to such sensory-deprivation experiments in public, simply try this one at home on a crisp

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winter's morning and you'll enjoy a weird aeroplane ride through skies unknown and uncharted by the astronomers of the 16th century. The aerodrome of López only admits planes with propeller engines to land - you'll understand the full meaning of this allusion when you purchase this.

I should resist such avian associations however. Everything about the work of López is calculated to 'blank out' most of our preconditioned, predetermined responses - he refuses titles for his works, and what little information supplied with available CD product is printed direct onto the disc, itself housed in a transparent slimline case. There's no denying López is a heavy-duty serious explorer in this terrain - he's also a Professor of Biology at the University of Madrid, and has made numerous releases in this vein since the early 1980s, available on European labels Trente Oiseaux, Staalplaat, Geometrik records, Drone Records, Sedimental, Sonoris and Povertech.

Untitled 1993 however can sound positively musical and over-cluttered compared to the *Untitled 74* CD on TOTE, which could be seen as a more attractively 'empty' proposition. For the most part it really does comprise long passages of total silence. These are occasionally broken up by brief spells of sound events, of a sort. They're a bit hard to describe. Imagine going outside on a clear summery day...only to find the entire population of the world has been destroyed by a chemical warfare attack. Anything left alive out there? Think of modern civilisation stopped dead and the enormous gap it would leave on the world. All the buses, trains and automobiles ground to a halt. All the power generators no longer humming away. All transistor radio batteries run down. The silence rushing in to fill this void - and that would have to be a pretty BIG silence - is what is captured here on this record, I would surmise.

You may think listening to something like this is easy. It's anything but! To try and make any sense out of this record requires a fair bit of concentration. I've tried, and haven't got that far myself. Recently I tried it with a pair of headphones. Baffling to relate, but that long passage of silence at the beginning isn't silence at all. There's something going on there all right, but what is it? How is it possible to record and reproduce sounds so remote and tiny that you're only dimly aware of them? I only wish I lived in a quieter neighbourhood! Then I might be able to concentrate on just what's going down here. No use turning up the volume - that'll only cause more damage - these are fugitive spirits, like fairies of the air which will vanish if you draw too near to them. You recall Conan Doyle and his early attempts to photograph fairies in the late 19th century. Francisco López, it would seem, has partially succeeded.

The third CD is the most imperceptible of these and it's the best one yet of the three! An hour-long silent CD with very very occasional interruptions of some sort. I hesitate to even call them interruptions, but they're identifiable (just) as the bits that aren't totally silent. These are sound events you don't *hear* so much as sense with your intuition - the same way you can detect a change in the weather, the vibration of a light breeze on the surface of the water, or a strange character entering the room. The concentration that's condensed into this 'silent' CD is so intense, that it really is exhausting to listen to it.

After listening to this man López I don't know what's going on in the world any more.

ED PINSENT

*Edition... 1261 Brook Knoll Pl, Lawrenceville, GA 30043, USA.
fenton@stonehenge.ohr.gatech.edu.*

Roel Meelkop

7 Perceptions

NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT STCD136 CD (1999)

I enjoy this one immensely, even though it's lonely and bleak...real music for the eternal departure lounge of your mind...waiting for that elusively surreal De Chirico steam engine which will never arrive to take you back home. As 'Nothing Music' goes, this is actually exceedingly eventful and never once descends to the level of ambient drone-murk. In fact, Meelkop studiously avoids the use of any musical tones, and does so with remarkable clarity and

rigour. Instead, through sampler and computer, he creates sharp, distinct and discrete events, and organises a full range of sounds so abstracted and untraceable they might well be documentary recordings taken from the control panels and engine rooms of an entire fleet of invading flying saucers from planet Neptune. You've got deep rumblings like distant blue thunder from another galaxy approaching over the next county, right next to up-close studies of interesting objects such as screwtop jars or hand muscle-builders squeaking away in the grip of an android servant. Sighs, clicks, skipping CDs, and mechanical whirrs, all bedded down in a rich compost of silence - a serene silence which is the work's foundation. Meelkop knows of his work's passing resemblance to that of Bernard Günter, but feels his work is 'more open, joyful and above all more audible'. Coming in from a painting background, Meelkop (also a member of Kapotte Muziek and Goem) bends modern music technology to suit his visual approaches. A great success.

ED PINSENT

CM Von Hausswolff Basic

USA, TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS
MOLYBDENUM TOE-CD-42 CD (1998)

A four-track long player from this Swedish composer, who also happens to be a visual artist. If he had a hand in designing the package of this little beaut, he should take a bow for executing that, as well as the beautifully simple music. It's another clear CD case, like Francisco López favours. Five slim inserts sandwiched together make up the cover, each printed on clear acetate. Hold them up to the light to see blurry half-tone photographs, and the titles - with enigmatic interpretations and cryptic clues - for each of the four pieces you're about to hear. This is the kind of stark typo and design excellence you normally find in artists' books gathering dust on the shelves of the Whitechapel art gallery...

Strap yourself in for the four cuts of *Basic*, which are something of an endurance test for the lugs of the unprepared. The first, 'Rotterdam Canaries', is a passage of unbearably high-pitched electronic twittering, as befits this very focused tribute to the little golden birdies. As 'Nothing' music goes, it's far from the standards of imperceptibility that Bernhard Günter might

demand, but it *is* exceedingly monotonous - in a quite brilliant way - and happy to refuse development. Near the end some real bird-song recordings emerge, hovering in the clear air like ghosts of their real source. For a far less successful treatment of bird song, see Peter Cusack's CD this issue.

Second round - 'Kalingrad Cake', and if you're expecting a sweet reward from that confectioner's title, think again. This is an intensely irritating geiger-counter loop set against a single, attenuated high tone which keens and wobbles slightly in the background. Like all the pieces here, the utter simplicity is what strikes you - Carl Michael limits himself to two sounds wherever possible, insisting on that discipline, and yet still achieving a tremendous sense of depth in the music. It's like the magic of geometry in the hands of Renaissance mathematicians, creating an optical illusion. The composer challenges you to hear *more* than what is going on, yet the second you're on the edge of uncovering something, he finds a way of refusing it.

Track three is 'Hamburg Fatigue', which is presumably a common syndrome amongst this composer's German fan-base of listeners (just kidding...). Again, a mere two tones are deployed in this long track - (1) a rising drone, pitched against (2) an exceptionally inert amplifier hum. Languid and sonorous, it's positively soothing after the previous two assaults on our

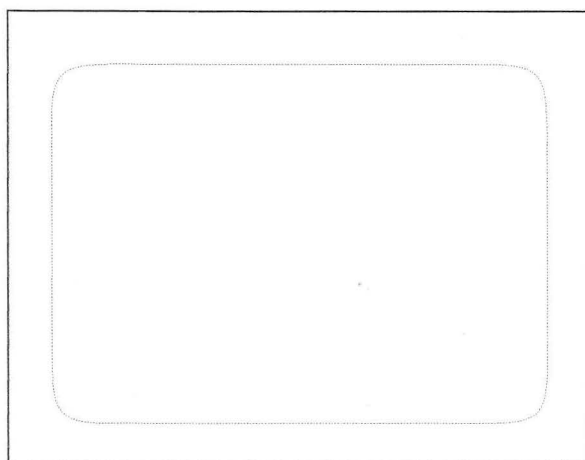
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nervous systems. Despite the mechanical nature of the machines' voices here, the hand of a human being is just about discernible in the way the throbbing tone varies from moment to moment - as though the good Von H were adjusting the pitch 'live'. As riveting as hip-hop gets, believe me. Still awake out there? Only one track to go...

It's called 'Stockholm Slumber', and even if the rest of this great recording isn't to your taste you should try and hear this one. It's an edgy, enervating mystery track! What the fuck is going on here? The most non-descript ambient recording available - could be taken from outside a lecture hall, because a muffled human voice is just about recognisable, but it's been stripped of anything but the most minimal vestiges of a vibration. This is set against a clunking, churning, shifting noise - a loop of furniture movers handling a large refrigerator, perhaps. And there's another high tone, which soon becomes agonising as it swoops from the air like some vicious wasp on the attack. Then there's the breathing - well, more like a muffled snort actually - a man asleep perhaps, in the arms of Morpheus like Magritte's *Reckless Sleeper*. In fact this track is the most dreamlike of the set - it's sure weird enough. There's enough of these fragments here to suggest that they're looped, and in the process made incredibly interesting - although they were boring as hell to start with. The magic of transformation. This could be the lesson behind the art of Von H, that he finds beauty and richness in the most inert and non-eventful sources. I'm reminded of a *Mad* magazine joke about Howard Hughes trying to prove he's still alive to his sceptical insurance brokers. He sends them a jar of his 'breath' - inviting them to compare it with his 'breath prints' of last year.

Ultimately this record is unknowable, the structures by which it was built are incomprehensible. Which is what makes it so winning. A baffling masterpiece which I recommend.

ED PINSENT



Skuli Sverrisson and Anthony Burr Desist

AUSTRIA, FIRE INC F-16 CD (1999)

Another sterling example of nothingness, this one arrives in a striking yellow and black cover which makes a positive virtue of barcodes and hard-edged straight lines in the Tom Phillips style - it's a modern design classic by Hjalte Karlsson. Musically speaking, *Desist* is by far the most listenable of what's on offer in this section, because it eschews harsh tones, insufferably high-pitched frequencies, or excess of length - in short all the things that can make Nothing Music such an obstacle to listening pleasure. *Desist* won't bore the trousers off you, though it may lull you into a delightful half-asleep state where intriguing solutions to the day's problems will fall into your lap. One or two cuts may veer on the friendly side of 'Ambient music', to be sure, but it never gets as sickly as, say, a bowl of whey. The pieces works best when they deal with ringing high tones and amplifier hum, which is mainly what these fellows work with - 'organised into a slow-moving fabric', is their trademark - and if you choose to make such vectors of emptiness your raw material, you're definitely down in the Zero, with the other Masters of Zero.

The very title *Desist* is perhaps an exhortation to the many shouting sinners abounding in this noisy world - is that mobile phone call on the bus really necessary, we might ask? Must you add your chunk of fatuity to the growing cloud of noise pollution? If not, desist. Skuli Sverrisson and Anthony Burr are a duo who have already tried their hands in the worlds of improv and free-jazz

and have over time built up an impressive roster of sparring partners between them. Solo releases by these two abound, but most interesting is the news that Skuli has been working with Laurie Anderson, the New York performance and mixed-media artist, in her recent *Moby-Dick* project. Something tells he's just the man for the job...their wide range of musical abilities might just account for why this fine release has more confidence and body than your average pile of electronic goop squirted into the racks by some teenage goon operating out of a dreary bedsit. This is a pleasant series of episodes, each of which drifts in and floats around on the periphery of your consciousness, before drifting back into the Arctic circle again. The final track is beautifully serene, and barely perceptible at all; we're advised to play loud, but I kind of like it at a softer level too. The creators work hard to make it more like 'music' than some of the other more austere composers here; we're not simply left with the dry, unfinished tones and left to make the best of it.

ED PINSENT



Bernhard Günter

Details Agrandis

USA, TABLE OF THE ELEMENTS TOE-CD-34
SELENIUM CD (1998)

To close this section, here's one by The Master. Although I only have this CD by Günter it seems the man has already built up an impressive collection of work, which stands apart in the field of modern musique concrète by virtue of its extreme ultra-minimalism. This German composer could be the new Emperor of Very Special Nothing Music; he's already been placed (by one critic) in a line with Luc Ferrari and Bernard Parmegiani, which takes some doing. As the Metamkine catalogue points out, this is music that seems to take the white noise that emanates from our hi-fi loudspeakers as the starting point, but then proceeds to give it solid form, and locate it within a stated environment with great precision. But I'm not that keen to drift into the realms of conceptual justification for a record like this when I find it so darned compelling and interesting to listen to. Having thrown down the gauntlet and suggested that 'VSNM' is some kind of ultra-minimal white canvas of sound, I take it all back - this is a tiny, microscopic world simply crowded with detail. You've just got to listen - really hard - to find it. There are rhythms - and melodies of a sort, even somewhere the suggestion of narrative developments. Yes, I've come away more than once convinced I've heard more lyrics than there are in the entire songbook of Cole Porter, yet there's not a single word (spoken or sung) in evidence. An art tutor once sneered at my early interest in modernism - 'Yeah, I suppose if you listen to a dripping tap for long enough it starts to sound like music!' And I've out-stared not a few white canvasses in lonely art galleries in my day! Maybe I am living in a delusional state then, but it's a good place to be. At least one of the three works on this record show I'm in good company - 'Stone Circles' is dedicated to Richard Long, the conceptual 'walking' artist. I used to loathe his work and now I see him as one of the misunderstood greats of the 1980s, a man possessed on single-handedly remaking the vital connections between the earth and the soul. Günter's been a sometime associate of another master of 'silence', Rolf Wehowsky, since the 1980s when they met at a workshop in Koblenz. RLW states of his worthy constituent that Günter is looking for the ultimate unambiguous statement of clarity. Judge for yourself whether he achieves this aim...look out for his debut work *Un Peu de neige salie*, or his *Impossible Grey* CD in the Cinema of the Ear mini-CD series. The present work originally appeared in 1994 and is offered again by our friends in America as a public service.

ED PINSENT

Unknowing the Progressive:

Rock as Non-Rock in the Late 1990s

By Chris Atton



The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

MY FIRST RECORD REVIEWS WERE WRITTEN AT AGE FOURTEEN, under the bedclothes by torchlight, one ear soaking up the crackly MW from the earpiece in the back of my Dansette. All the required elements for nostalgia are there: they are emblematic, perhaps unconvincing, but true enough. During that first year of listening to John Peel I would enter into my notebook an account of everything I heard on his show. In those days I was reviewing blind (well, deaf): I had no personal musical histories on which to build my tastes. Though these developed soon enough, for a few months I was hearing everything in its own, hermetic space; notions of influence, genre and collaboration came later. Yet somewhere resonances and preferences were being formed - and these quite quickly. I was repelled, I remember, by blues-based electric music. Little wonder that the music I took to straightaway had nary a blues lick in it: English progressive rock and the rock avant-garde of France (Gong, Magma) and Germany (Faust, Tangerine Dream). Of course, none us called them 'progressive' or 'avant-garde' - we didn't have names for them until we started reading the music papers and learning what we should call them. With naming comes a loss of innocence; we can never return to those formative moments where the music (of whatever genre) we love was first hard-wired into us. For some, though, there appears a perpetual striving after the music of their youth - not to hear it filtered and rewrought through a lifetime's other listening - but to hear it purely, nostalgically, to regain a lost time.

The plethora of re-issues of progressive rock on CD speaks not simply to an acquisitiveness: such items appear part of a knowing attempt to commodify the old fans' memories of their youth. The micro-gatefolds of a recent Japanese series of progressive rock releases have been promoted by those good people at C&D Compact Disc Services of Dundee as:

for 60s and 70s music fans who want to relive their musical past in miniature, evoking memories of vinyl days gone by, whilst enjoying the crackle free sound of a CD, with the added thrill of a full colour, solid card album cover to drool over!

We have also seen the arrival of groups such as Radio Massacre International and the Interstellar Concrete Mixers, dedicated to rehearsing the German synthesiser classics (especially Tangerine Dream post-*Atem*) of the 1970s on digital instruments (and the occasional Mellotron). Even Julian Cope, with his *Rite 2*, is at it. Such practices are understandable, if only for the security that nostalgia brings. Some might argue that they are 'rediscovering' the music of their past, though to relive the music under different commercial and cultural conditions (as a mature buyer of a 'contemporary' recording format) only weakly revives the notion of discovery. Stronger forms of discovery are closed off to those who insist on inhabiting the past exclusively, whether preferring to listen only to music of a certain period, or to give a hearing only to new music that conforms to the principles and characteristics of an historical genre.

Perhaps the strongest form of discovery is that founded on naïveté and ignorance; impossible to achieve after decades of listening, of course. There is a sublime joy in being ignorant of the trappings (commercial, cultural, historical, musicological) of a piece of music, to be able to hear it unequivocally and unmediated (as far as it can ever be) as one's own, personal, private, enclosed experience - as if the music only exists in order for you - the sole listener - to hear it. In such a virgin state of mind, perhaps better than any other time, the listener 'makes' the music. Recently I was able to get close to this 'unknowing' state, where I felt myself capable of 'making music' out of what I was hearing. Of course, I now come to music listening from a far more knowing perspective: a large record collection, a large library of theoretical, biographical and reference works, far too much time spent scouring second-hand record shops; my listening is so over-determined by such paraphernalia that it seemed impossible I would ever hear anything 'new'. When our august editor sent me an intriguingly plump package of CDs for review, I found amongst them some that were 'new' - they inevitably set up resonances and remembrances of listening from times past, but they were, on first listening, for me entirely unknown - who the musicians were I knew not, what musical aesthetics they preferred I knew not; even the design values of the sleeves were opaque to me. For a few hours I was fourteen again.

I was fourteen again firstly with Bass Communion. Impossible to put aside all preconceptions: does a triple-gatefolded double CD in a slipcase qualify this as 'progressive' on packaging alone? And even given that the second CD is a twenty-minute EP, a total running time of eighty minutes makes it a double album in my book. And that title does seem to have echoes of Steve Hillage's 'Salmon Song': sort of Whitley Streiber-meets-alien-fish concept album? (unless 'bass' is read

as ... oh). These factors apart, the music didn't scream 'progressive' - point of fact, it didn't scream at all. Quite undemonstratively it took me along with it, unfolding in a dangerously unhurried manner, forcing one to inhabit a continuous present of musical stasis, though being aware that the music had changed and would change again. Memory and anticipation seemed suspended. My only previous experience of such a remarkable and powerful effect is with Morton Feldman's longer (sixty minutes plus) works. With Bass Communion, length appears irrelevant. The opening one-minute 'Advert' apart, tracks average ten minutes, the longest seventeen. Yet the 'continuous present effect' leaves one in no-time. They have no length: they begin, continue and end. Endings are very decisive on this record. The closing moments of '16 second swarm' finds a solo organ, shorn of its accompanying decelerating flute ensemble, pulling away from the skewed rhythmic static that has underlain the piece for much of its duration. The physical movement of the keys as the sustained organ tones shift are distinctly audible - as are the fingers as they leave the keyboard to conclude the piece. This may be ambient music to some, but it is palpable, human, physical - it is never less than engaging in its construction; no background atmospherics these. Impossible to put aside all memories. Florian Fricke is preparing to play his Moog solo in the first movement of Tangerine Dream's *Zeit* ('Birth of Liquid Pleiades') - he waits for the dramatic stasis of the organ to cease before he begins. It ceases. He begins. That's the end of '16 second swarm' - except instead of a Moog solo we have a silent gesture - a hand leaving a keyboard.

Steven Wilson - the man behind Bass Communion - favours organ and synth throughout these pieces. His accomplice, one Theo Travis, supplies drones on flute and saxophones. But no mellifluous New Age nonsense, this: its continuous present prevents us luxuriating in the apparent lushness. Extenuated, desiccated electronica - beats constructed from radio interference, untraceable taps, a sonar blip - litter the ground over which these instruments range. No compulsion in the rhythm, always that stasis. 'A grapefruit in the world of park' finds Wilson squeezing out the richness from a Robert Fripp soundscape, leaving an intermittent, colloquy of distance. As with most of the music here, Wilson's processes engender a mournful poise, balanced between the present and a nostalgia for the unexperienced. Out of it can come the occasional alarm: is that really Keith Emerson's portentous fanfare from the ELP's reading of Ginastera's 'Toccata' I hear in 'Grammatic oil'?

In the music of Bass Communion I hear progressive rock, but the Emerson motif is only a trivial part of that hearing. I am not insisting, as many do, that progressive rock must only adhere to the rules of the past. In his fine exploration of the genre (*The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock*, Quartet, 1997), Paul Stump cites an anonymous writer in the progressive rock fanzine *The Organ* asserting: 'The last thing you want a Progressive band to do is progress.' As Stump points out, there is much music being made today that might be considered progressive in its imaginative use of technology, its refusal to slavishly reproduce the blues legacy, its proponents' desire to break out of the restricted cultural formats of production and consumption. It might be idealistic, individualistic, it might fall flat on its face at times (just like any innovative project can); at least it is being attempted. Bass Communion is hardly rock, but in it I hear progressive values (in the best sense of the phrase).

Not a day after writing the above, I read in the monthly *Classic Rock* (I know, I know...) that Steven Wilson is the brains behind Porcupine Tree and No-Man, bands keeping Progressive progressive in the 1990s (and, for that reason, no doubt less than popular with Progressive fans). No-Man's 'Flowermouth' (1994) is, I read, very highly thought-of. That doesn't surprise me, on the evidence of Bass Communion. 'Flowermouth' features Fripp and Mel Collins (another King Crimson connection). Listening in ignorance so often takes one back to one's formative years, it seems, even if inadvertently. Here I am already finding it impossible to hear innocently, already bringing my own listening experiences to bear and - coming up with an experience that does not seem far removed from the musicians' own listening histories. Perhaps this is the only way for an inveterate listener to be ignorant: to come to each new music not trying to deny one's own accumulated experience, rather being ignorant of the values, histories and intentions of the musicians.

Would that the route back to one's own listening histories was always so revelatory. In the case of Joachim Roedelius, I merely ended up where I knew I'd be. I really didn't want to trust my map; I wanted to be taken on another mystery tour. Soaked in the music of Kluster/Cluster; Harmonia; Eno, Moebius and Roedelius, I hoped that his *Selfportrait VII: Dem Wind voran* ('ahead of the wind') on Captain

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Trip would go beyond the predictable 'New Age-with-a-few-rough-edges-but-not-so-many-that-you'd-notice' sub-sub-genre he's carved out for himself. But this forty-odd minute set of eight pretty, occasionally wheezy, tunes disappoints. Even our good friends at C&D Services seem to have lost patience with him, writing much of this later output off as 'the rather boring New Age stuff'. They describe it as 'crystalline,' which is precisely the word my partner used when she heard it. What she meant, though, was that it sounded just like the music that you'd hear in shops selling crystals. And it does. And there's shedloads of it, by all accounts. Roedelius whistles on the last track, accompanying a horrible, sugary piano ballad. You really don't need to know any more. Given the label's Japanese provenance, it'll probably go for top price in the UK. Avoid, unless you like your heroes making the same record for decades on end.

Moving swiftly on... They tell me that we must not confuse AMP with Amp. Fine. So *Alien Registration Office* is by AMP. Well, it's by A.M.P. Studio to be precise, this being the solo project of AMP's Richard Walker. These are the facts, though they will not interfere with my pristine listening one iota. *Alien Registration Office* can only be described as taking the listener on several excursions through realms simultaneously beautiful and restless. Curdled synth lines, rolls of indescence, contoured tones, neon pulses, tidal dissonance, heaving drum loops and the sound of a distant world spinning off its axis! Sorry, those last two sentences were from the press release. These are the facts, though they will not interfere with my pristine listening one iota. Except that they make you want to hurl the thing out of the window, slipcase and all (what is it with slipcases, all of a sudden?). And 'indescence'? What's that? And can you get it in a roll? And did you spot the unnecessary apostrophe? And don't you just hate the overuse of the exclamation mark!?

I continue: innocent of all histories of sound, particularly of A.M.P. Studio, possibly swayed by a temptation to construe said press release as evidence of musician's own values. Will this get in the way of 'unknowing listening'? The album begins with clattery drums supporting whispery, Vega-like vocals. Synth lines move in and out of the mix, to little purpose. This is redolent of the early 80s Dome releases (and didn't their first album contain a piece titled 'Ampnoise?'). It's restless and urgent but seems uninterested in taking us anywhere. The further we proceed into the recordings the more I hear 'bedroom studio' - the flatly-recorded Spanish guitar of '32 paths virtually' and the piano of '231 gates round' are mere noodling - the latter has neither the *jeu d'esprit* of Epic Soundtrack's pianisms ('A Raincoat's Room' on the second Swell Maps album) nor the rigour of a Reich piano piece (not that I'd expect that). It sits embarrassed between the two, not sure of where to turn for inspiration. By the time I get to the thin junglism of 'some kind of...' and the birdsong accompanying what sounds like a stylophone playing a lame pentatonic non-melody ('bird blues'), I'd had enough. Perhaps hidden in the last fifteen minutes of this CD lies some of those rolls of indescence, or even a sound or two of a distant world spinning off its axis. If you buy this and found it to be so, do let me know.

Still shuddering from memories of how shabby the experimental rock music of the 80s could be and still marvelling at how anyone would want to repeat it, I approached Illusion of Safety's sandpaper-wraparound sleeve with trepidation (as if this situ-inspired motif hasn't been done to death already, by such divers hands as the Durutti Column and the ICA - the brass paper fastener keeping the CD in place is a nice touch, though). I needn't have worried. This nth release in the 'Mort aux Vaches' series commissioned for a Dutch avant-garde radio project (natch) is the second in the series by Illusion of Safety (it says here), though this one is by a single Illusion person, Dan Burke, on improvised electronics. What these electronics are and where they come from I neither know nor care; neither do I have any sense of Burke's aesthetic preferences, they provenance or their purpose. I can construct them only through my own aesthetic preferences, which might make for misleading and vexatious nonsense, but that's all I can do. The six untitled pieces comprising the 50-odd minutes I hear as a single, continuous multi-movement composition, dominated by dense, slowly-developing blocks of non-referential sound, immune to subjective interpretation. Instrumental colours privilege a rich opaqueness in droning basses and shrill, whistling, purely-voiced upper registers. When these give way to other sounds the impact can be startling: track 2's railway oscillations move into more *Zeit*-esque periodicities, slow and suspended yet utterly lacking in the drama and mystery that characterises much of the early 1970s German synthesiser corpus. And all the more remarkable for those absences.

I hope you can forgive my nostalgic comparisons. These are not to place the music derivatively. If it has any connections with the Kosmische heritage industry it is in its fearless experimentation with electronic sounds in ways that suggest a very knowing appreciation of the genres informed by electronic music. At the same time it is quite prepared to upturn the conventions of those genres. It thus infuses them with an aesthetic that would alarm the Froese/Schulze recidivists - their heroes would never bust their genres so audaciously. Listen to the steel-ball-rolling-around-in-a-pan solo that bridges tracks 2 and 3, similarly the alarming edit between the varispeed burlblings of 4 and the metallic breathings and surgings of 5. For those who don't want their electronic music to progress, Dan Burke's achievements are an affront. For the rest of us, he is to be lauded. This release can justly hold its head up in some of the finest electroacoustic company currently active (such as those on Jérôme Noetinger's Metamkine label).

And so to *At Home with Alp*. Memory isn't playing tricks here, I know: I can't find the reference, but I know that Michael Prime out of Morphogenesis. The idea is that you record the sounds of domestic machinery (toilets, kettles, washing machines, door handle, microwave), process them in unrevealed ways and release them. Here are 45 minutes of such tomfoolery by a former member of O Yuki Conjugate (for those who care about lineage), one Roger Horberry. Call me pedestrian, but after sticking my ear against my central heating boiler for a couple of minutes I found the sounds fascinatingly complex as they were, without feeling the strong urge to take them off for 'processing' (which sounds a little, well, Brave New World, doesn't it?). What are we hearing here? How much is original and how much 'processed'? Whilst I admire people who don't get out much, I feel that this is the ultimate home recording feat and as such should be strongly discouraged. Thomas Leer and Robert Rental warned in the sleeve notes to *The Bridge* that the extraneous sounds to be heard during the songs were those of their domestic appliances and were to be considered as part of the music. I always felt that was a cop-out. *At Home with Alp* makes a concept album out of such an observation. The floodgates are open - or should that be the cistern? It is impossible for me to hear this music separately from its recording history. However spectacular the forms it takes - and at times it does get fairly cosmic, believe me (especially where the fridge-freezer comes on like a UFO preparing for take-off) - the fact that it's all domestic appliances makes not for mystery, but for bathos. I'd have preferred not to know how it was made. Just as my formative listening showed me all those years ago, an ignorance of technical and cultural determinants can prove a joy.

✻ ✻ Works Reviewed ✻ ✻ ✻ ✻

Bass Communion, Bass Communion II

HIDDEN ART HI-ART 4 2 X CD (1999)

Available by mail order from No-Man Mail Order, 76 Eade Road, Norwich, NR3 3EJ. www.nomansland.demon.co.uk/
Email: steven@nomansland.demon.co.uk

Joachim Roedelius, Selfportrait VII: Dem Wind voran

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP RECORDS CTCD-193 CD (1999)

3-17-14 Minami-Koiwa, Edogawa-Ku, Tokyo, Japan.
www.md.xaxon.ne.jp/cpttrip Email: cpttrip@md.xaxon.ne.jp

A.M.P. Studio, Alien Registration Office

OCHRE RECORDS OCH 017LCD CD (2000)

Ochre Records, PO Box 155, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL51 0YS. www.ochre.co.uk

Illusion of Safety, Mort aux Vaches

NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT [NO NUMBER, NO DATE] CD

Distributed by These Records in the UK.

Alp, At Home with Alp

USA, SOLEILMOON SOL91CD CD (1999)

Distributed by These Records in the UK.

THE DRONING O-N-E-S

Muslingauze

Azad

NETHERLANDS,
STAALPLAAT MUSLIMLIM
022 CD (1999)

A further 15 posthumous fragments from the sizeable backlog of unissued Muslingauze tapes. These tracks have real force, but compared with earlier LP-long tracks I've heard, the *Azad* sketches sometimes fade abruptly, and seem a tad inconsequential to these ears. Nonetheless I relish this particular batch simply for the repeated use of bird calls, especially the one or two tracks which feature peacocks. I could do with a whole CD of that haunting peacock cry actually, but this'll do for now - Bryn Jones has made an exceptionally powerful use of that avian loop, making this a truly delectable piece of exotica as sweet as a perfumed box of Turkish Delight. Other high-pitched bird cries likewise rise to the fore of the mix, giving the overpowering drum loops something truly piercing to contend with. Those bass-heavy drum rattles, when played loud, start to acquire quite a fearsome character, as do the other foreign sounds (some are Eastern music bites) acquired perhaps from shortwave radio samples. Top marks also to the exceptional packaging for this one - cutouts, embossed jewel case front and back, and a real Arabian banknote slipped into the box...as I'm wholly ignorant of foreign affairs, and a latecomer to the Muslingauze universe, it's virtually impossible for me to make any cogent remark on the dialectic behind all this obsession with the Middle East, and my woolly mentalising it away in a sort of Arabian Nights / Tintin in the Land of Black Gold pastiche...faced with titles like 'Benzoin Incense Vendor', 'Scientist of India Garden', and

'Turmeric Sahara Gaze'. So, for a more informed view, read my erstwhile colleague War Arrow below.

ED PINSENT

Muslingauze

Hand of Fatima

USA, SOLEILMOON
RECORDINGS SOL 90 CD
(1999)

Muslingauze

Fakir Sind

USA, SOLEILMOON
RECORDINGS SOL 80 CD
(1999)

As you may know, Bryn Jones is sadly no longer with us. I found the news of his untimely demise more saddening than is usual in such cases. Okay, I didn't know him from Adam (not that I know anyone called Adam in the first place) but I remember his name cropping up on flyers and in fanzines from way back when he started out as E.G. Oblique Graphique, so for me, he was one of the boys, my generation, that kind of thing. I know folks who knew him, and he did some great records.

Towards the end he must've been as good as living in the studio, shitting out one album after another, and probably in real time. No label could have hoped to keep pace with such a

perversely prolific output. Now that his body of work has become unexpectedly finite, Soleilmoon are starting to catch up, releasing a back catalogue of posthumous recordings in an undertaking that is surely on par with the construction of the pyramids. Among these

is a boxed set of nine CDs. What is most surprising is that even this isn't particularly surprising. I'll bet you couldn't move for pizza boxes in that studio towards the end. So you've got to wonder what the last few

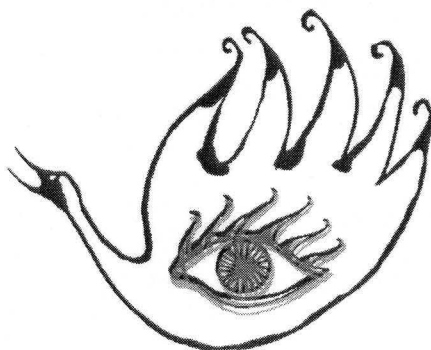
to say it was all done with tape manipulation. I actually find this very hard to believe, so if true, then his skill in this area was unsurpassed. To say the percussion is mesmeric or hypnotic is only scratching the surface, for despite the sparsity of sound sources, there seems to be a lot more going on than can easily be described in such terms. The drums dominate a backdrop of bird calls, market sounds, Arabic instruments and so on, creating a distinctively Islamic ambience. This much you probably know. The extraneous aural condiments have evolved over time, but the emotional stratum has remained unchanged



hundred Muslingauze albums were like. Andy Warhol did some really long films. And they were shit.

The music of Muslingauze is heavily rhythmic, so the playing and recording of the percussion is, as one would hope, absolutely spot on. I'm informed that Mr Jones never used samplers, that is

since *Hunting Out With An Ariel Eye* (1984?), *Haji* (1986) and *The Rape Of Palestine* (1988) - all of which really blow yer nadders off. The nuts and bolts of the Muslingauze sound once varied considerably from album to album whilst consistently projecting the same intensity of purpose. It's the usual canvas and



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the usual picture but at least he would swap brushes or try a different shade of brown every once in a while. *Fakir Sind* and *Hand Of Fatima* are virtually indistinguishable from one another. Musically it's business as usual, so surely, you might think, it's all good.

The trouble is that one gets the feeling Jonesy, having committed himself to doing a new album every two hours, may have suffered from pangs of guilt at the sheer repetitive nature of his work. To this end he has apparently taken to monkeying around with his tried and tested formula, screwing up the sound quality in places, and every so often stopping the tape dead to let a drum sound die away in the echo. This would be okay once or twice, but he keeps doing it. It sounds like the CD is knackered, or the leads are shorting out on your speakers, or at worst Steve Stapleton's got hold of the master tapes. Were I a soppy bastard I might come up with some old cobblers about 'drawing attention to the failings of the medium' or 'defying expectations by emphasising flaws and cock ups', but no. It just gets irritating. Muslingauze were surely never intended to be relaxing, but I doubt they were ever trying to be wilfully abrasive either.

If, as Mr Jones claimed - despite statements made to the contrary presumably in order to avoid getting into arguments - Muslingauze were entirely political, then he did himself a disservice with these two. Titles like 'Why No Dogs In Nizamabad' and 'Let's Have More Dagga, Begum' hint at a certain desperation creeping in. What next? 'Carry On Follow That Camel'? 'Sheik Rattle And Roll'? Had his interests been focused on Inuit rather than Middle Eastern culture would these albums have included tracks called 'Let's Rub Noses' and 'No More Blubber For Me, Thanks - I'm Stuffed'? Bryn Jones has produced more than one masterpiece over the years. Let us remember him for them, and not for these.

WAR ARROW



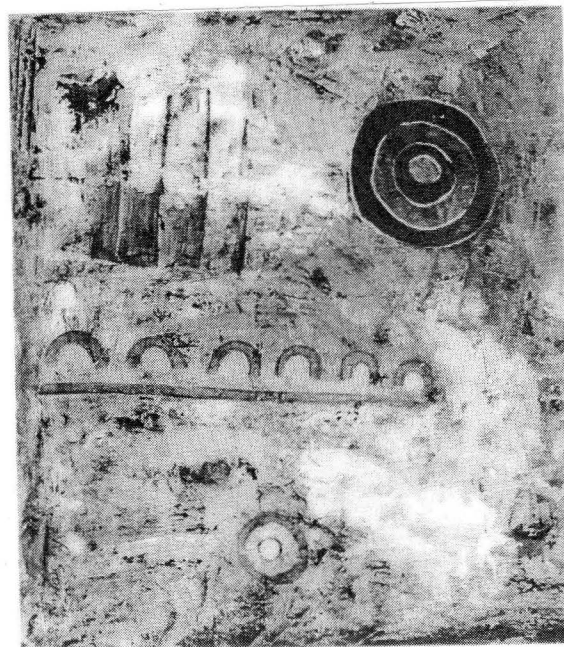
Anna Planeta

Anna Planeta

BETLEY WELCOMES
CAREFUL DRIVERS
BWCD007 2 X CD (1999)

Quite superb double-disc helping of low-key, lo-fi, anonymous and mysterious droneworks from the anonymous and mysterious Anna Planeta phenomenon. If *The Blair*

Witch Project movie deserved a musical soundtrack, I would vote this as a prime candidate; you've rarely heard music that conveys such a sense of isolation, of being almost completely sealed off from external stimulation and dwelling amidst a strange cult or coven, all natural feeling repressed until you can feel your own brain stewing in a cauldron of internalised emotions. To facilitate your entry into such a world, by all means spin your way into orbit of the heavy gravitational pull of Anna Planeta. The circumstances of its creation are an index to the palpable



sense of weird, dark loneliness it emanates; over two years, a group of maladjusts occupied a deserted Catholic schoolhouse in a remote-ish part of the country. Who were these mystery people? Squatters? Crusties? Anarchists? Drug users? Or just plain outcasts? No matter. Without electricity, and partly under the wing of Phil Todd acting as a species of instigator / producer, the natural sounds of the building itself were used and played against whatever performative makeshift tools might come to hand; some acoustic musical instruments, a battery-operated toy organ, a violin, a triangle, vying with creaking chairs and floorboards, and other 'sonic events generated by the buildings themselves'. Somebody started the tape recorder running long after everyone had got going, so these long tracks kick off at a point that's already advanced well beyond trance-state and they suck the listener into a vortex of near-stasis, the sound of 'idle and

troubled youths' who have somehow stumbled onto the harmony of the spheres and instinctively know not to vary by one iota that rare bliss-state, balancing on that sweet pinnacle of ecstasy for long, testing sessions. The murky facts behind this story are weird enough to already have passed into urban myth - kind of like our very own Amon Düül commune story - but what's impressive is that, without even trying, this project manages to create effects that more high-minded establishment avant-garde figures like The Dream Syndicates or the Philip

also recorded under many guises and with many others of his ilk - Kapotte Muziek and Beequeen being but two names to conjure with. On this, his debut full-length recording, he's created a massive guitar-derived exercise from 1997 and he uses the one instrument with a four-track and the 'PT Device'. Starting out with a series of simple and monotonous strums, he overdubs and echoes these until the drone gains momentum - in the framework of a very single-minded and intensive exploration. Yes, the thrill-seekers among you might get bored - but wait patiently until this shimmering jewel of sound mutates into that marvellous unified set of shifting tones, with no real specific note or colour, or discernible centre of gravity. A magnificent grindy drone proceeds to hang in the air and shimmer like a golden Christmas tree. Finally, it's as mighty and inspirational a work as any managed by the American 'Holy Minimalists' (some of whom get far more kudos than they deserve), and fully meets the criteria of utter simplicity in its compositional and practical method of realisation - and without claiming any high ground, or ever once lapsing into pretentiousness. The sleeve art depicting strata and rock formations refers back to the 'lost world' of Pangaea, the ancient name given to the whole earth before it separated apart and drifted into the continents. Needless to say the epic-scaled dynamics and tectological energies involved in this plate-shifting event are more than echoed in the power of this music! Very very effective indeed - leave it on repeat play all night, and you will dream of Heaven.

ED PINSENT



Rapoon Navigating By Colour

USA, SOLEILMOON
RECORDINGS SOL 71 CD
(1999)

In homage perhaps to Brian Eno's *Before and After Science* LP, Rapoon's latest edition is a CD issued with a fine set of 12 postcards of Robin Storey's alluring paintings, which look like half-obfuscated magic runes and ancient markings clashing with abstract blocks of colour. His painterly background is reflected in the music's titles (and the music really) when he 'navigates by colour' and names his paintbox for us - 'Prussian', 'Cerulean', 'Red Hemisphere',

Glass Ensembles of this world have sweated blood over. It's true - just put the right tools in the right hands at the right time, and you can create magic almost anywhere. 'The sacred meets the very profane,' states Todd, clutching at images to describe the anomalies of the situation. Sadly limited to 400 copies due to damage at the CD pressing plant...grab one while you can and expose for yourself the hollowness of *The Blair Witch Project*.

ED PINSENT

7 Woodside, Madeley, Crewe,
Cheshire CW3 9BA
ptodd@tesco.net

Shifts Pangaea

ELSIE + JACK RECORDINGS
#002 CD (1998)

Absolutely superb 44 minute shifting drone-work by a past master of the genre, Frans de Waard - the Dutch artist behind the Staalplaat business, who has

The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

'Sienna'...I always recommend Robin Storey's solo recordings to anyone, but (in common with quite a few on the Soleilmoon / Staalplaat roster) he tends to keep making the same record every year. It's not a bad record to repeat - each track is beautiful and haunting, but the only changes he rings this time are occasionally adding mechanical drumbeats to the mix. On occasion these are filtered along with the rest of the treated samples, so that everything blends into the misty haze. When Rapoon music works, it's genuinely moving, sonorous echoing passages that suggest a great faded splendour of past civilisations, and indeed a sense of religious awe. This music can also sound incredibly lonely; you become a lone listener in a bleak and foggy landscape, and start to notice the lack of human interaction in the pre-programmed playing, which - although elegant and expertly done - sometimes reinforces the fact that one person alone made the music.

ED PINSNT

Jonathan Coleciough Windlass

AUSTRIA, KORM
PLASTICS
INTRODUCTIONARY
PAPERBACKS KIP 016 CD
(1999)

An excellent monotonal exploration into unexplored ranges of strange darkness and colour-blending from this one-man hurdy-gurdy show and former associate of the very special 'Mr Organum' David Jackman. An episodic trance journey is calling you, stage after stage in a wooden trireme, rowing the sea-bobbing mariner through dark swells of oily ocean, past threatening islands of strange old birds, the cave of the Cyclops and indeed the Sirens themselves, only to come home to roost in the port of a blissful island not unlike the land of the Lotus eaters. Yes, it's like Poseidon rocking you with storms and earthquakes one moment and then arriving at a safe haven next day...having bombarded you with some agonizing shrill tones and menacing blasts, this music rewards you with a calming and serene series of blissful harmonic overtones at the end.

Allegedly all the sounds heard here were generated using no

more or less than an actual windlass, which is part of the mechanism used in operating the locks on canals. Personally I don't believe one word of that - not even the part about 'canals' really existing, because I often suspect they're just a manufactured fiction invented to sell us the idea of 'the idyllic countryside' on some theme park basis. Part of an offprint Staalplaat mid-price label and comes with a vomity-inducing sleeve ripped from the pages of a ghastly pre-war colour cookbook.

ED PINSNT

Neil Campbell
String quartets,
loops, garden talk
PRIVATE PRESS CDR (1999)

Ashtray
Navigations
Those are Pearls
that were his Eyes
USA, SOLIPSISM 03 CD
(1999)

Two very good new independent CDs from our own UK heroes of home-made avant droneworthy

explorations. This is the third thing I've heard from Neil Campbell and I confess I'm becoming addicted to his brand of no-nonsense, sumptuously excessive and rich mono-noise. There's a great tape called *The Singing Pubis*, an almighty racket which he recorded in 1998 with just acoustic guitar and cymbal, an artefact 'packaged' by his own fair mitts through securing it to a piece of corrugated card with a piece of garden wire. This tape's 'junk' aesthetic is a ploy to disguise its aberrant beauty in a world already filled with too



lines of devoid

no
structures



highly confused
mixture of ritual
ritual of burning



"Turn that stupid stuff off!"

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much junk. The splendid LP *These Premises are No Longer Bugged*, I mention again (see issue 5) because we omitted to mention it was released by Patrick Marley's label Giardia Recordings from PO Box 2571, Minneapolis, MN 55402 USA.

String quartets, loops, garden talk, Campbell's new Recordable CD, comprises 13 haunting episodes you're not likely to forget in a hurry. The programme alternates two strands of musical activity. There are brief, faintly hilarious pieces of speeded-up records being sabotaged by Neil's intermittent electronic belches - a trick familiar from The Mothers of Invention early records, which should endear many a segment of the audience. These are followed immediately by the sort of deeply resonant, scorching drone-fests which we 'normally' associate with the guy. These massive drones are effected using violins, guitars and scraped percussion, all recorded in such ways as to massively distort the natural sounds and generate far too many conflicting frequencies, all at once. Oh, that's grand! He occasionally creates effects on a par with the important Faust and Tony Conrad Dream Syndicate LP, though he'd personally prefer to associate this kind of meat-eating, ballsy feedback noise with the likes of Black Sabbath and Spacemen 3. It's all the more impressive when you figure he's doing it solo and with ten times the sense of humour of any dingbat rock combo or (more to the point) any pretentious concept artist turned musician.

Humour, is no doubt, as important to Campbell as the music - and the same goes for Phil Todd, the Ashtray Navigations mastermind. Well, I say humour - at least, a sense of perspective that prevents them from taking themselves too seriously, with no resulting damage to the music. The two are old friends. Campbell was interviewed by Phil Todd in *Opprobrium* magazine and stated baldly '...what I am doing comes from very basic rock and pop...I can sit and enjoy John Cage and Tony Conrad [but] I didn't know what the "avant-garde" was until I reached a certain age. It's just about having fun and having a good time.' And again, insisting on his feedback drone music's position within the rock music continuum, 'My stuff is just Post-Velvets rock music. It's just that fuckin' rock people can't notice it as rock music.' Besides founding The A-Band and

exhibiting a healthy interest in the cheap bulk production of recorded musical product by any means possible through a network of international friendly weirdoes, Paisley-born Campbell is associate to fellow exiles Julian

odyssey into the ocean depths, he deploys his familiar attenuated guitar sounds and skating rink organ in sparing washes of limp tone. The sea-nymphs call us and enchant the incautious mariner, much like the sirens...before you

now a quintet - but this early 10" record documents two performances from 1998 when they were 'jamming good' as two separate trios, with Michael Flowers acting as shared member. On this gorgeous

artefact, housed in a two-colour screenprinted sleeve, we have two sumptuous long tracks of superlative airy drone music that can't fail to raise the most torpid of spirits. 'Falling Free You And Me' is Campbell playing with Flowers and Julian Bradley, and the intense tapestry of sound evokes the feeling of a futuristic Gamelan ensemble fed on the most intense of psychedelic drugs and already halfway on their trip to Nirvana by the time the needle connects with the black stuff...as on many a Neil Campbell project, the recording has been edited just to present you with the most exciting and intense moment, so no long wait for the listener while the band warms up. The flipside 'Filling Sacks With Coloured Scraps' is pure eastern psychedelia, and is slightly busier than the noisy but serene drone of its companion - featuring Flowers with Adam Davenport and Bridget Hayden. These three lock into a winning sound, brushing and bowing stringed instruments which might be sitars or treated guitars, with distorted tambourine-like percussion, and the players are so stuck into the righteous jamming groove that it's a genuine shame when the grooves run out. Record collectors gladly pay £40 and up for rare LP examples of eastern jamming

recorded in the 1960s, featuring either genuine Indian sitar music but wrapped in a psychedelic sleeve, or worse yet rock musicians trying to emulate the same thing. Either way you can bet that those overpriced monsters don't sound anything as beautiful as this!

ED PINSENT

Available from Neil Campbell, 16 Hirst Street, Mirfield, West Yorkshire WF14 8NS, United Kingdom

Priced £5 in the UK, £7 rest of world

Other Vibracathedral Orchestra recordings available from the same address - *Lino Hi CD* on Giardia Records, and *Hollin CD-R*



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Bradley, and Richard Youngs (who is involved on at least one track on *String quartets, loops, garden talk*) - Youngs being another hero of self-produced art LPs, one of which (*Advent*) has already warranted reissuing on CD.

Ashtray Navigations' latest comes packaged in a luxurious full-colour inlay of a Buddhist garden, and it's a single 48 minute piece recorded in Easter 1998. Like Campbell, Phil Todd's preference is to attempt to combine as many possible conflicting frequencies all at once. But where Campbell starts recording right in the middle of the maelstrom, Todd builds up to it gradually, adding layer after layer of translucent accretions to the total tableau like a watercolour artist. Here, on his Shakespearean *Tempest*-inspired

know where you are you're surrounded by an astonishingly dense, heavy mass of sounds, quite literally drowning in a thick fog of overdubs. Yet it never seems chaotic, or unbearable - as always, Todd knows how to master this mass of power, as surely as Neptune rules the waves with his trident.

ED PINSENT

Solipsism, 26 S Main #277,
Concord, NH 03301, USA

Vibracathedral Orchestra Vibracathedral Orchestra

NO LABEL, NO NUMBER 10"
VINYL LP (1999)

Neil Campbell's current venture, the Vibracathedral Orchestra, is

**Rhodri Davies
/ John Bisset**
Malthouse
2:13 MUSIC 2:13CD010
CD (1999)

One of the more unusual improv recordings to have reached us since we began this venture, *Malthouse* - or *Odyngalch* in its Welsh title - is a series of harp and guitar duets of a highly singular strangeness. Davies, fresh from his recent successful live performances with the string trio IST, embarks on this studio project with a real sense of adventure, and treats the harp as though it's one of the strangest inventions on God's earth. It's as if he's determined to set the harp free from any of the usual preconceptions we civilians might have about that particular instrument, eg that it's too quiet, that it doesn't belong in an improvising context, that it's a soppy instrument only played by old bags like Margaret Dumont in 19th century drawing rooms, or even - horrors - that it immediately says 'Welsh heritage' to the casual listener. Rhodri Davies throws the rule book out of the window, and I can only guess from this recording what violence he's doing to conventional playing techniques. The harp has never sounded so bizarre, so impolite, or capable of such a dirty sound - as near as acoustic improv gets to heavy metal!

This record see Davies vying for position on the improv race-track with fellow Welsh player and fellow string-man John Bisset the guitarist. Judging by the inner photo, both of them are fond of 'preparing' their instruments in a wildly elaborate way, with crocodile clips, sticks inserted between strings and hanging plates of metal being *de rigueur* if you want to maintain social standing in the Malthouse circle. Bisset's energetic free-form strumming technique is exactly what's needed to set the works in a perfect context, and like his fellow countryman he's not afraid of flinging out some violent acoustic sounds - but these sparring bouts never descend into the free-for-all clichés of which some improv combos are still capable. In contrast to some yowling, big-balled macho improv records, Malthouse exhibits a discipline and dignity that prevents it descending into chaos. But do play it loud, whatever you do!

Comes with a fine cover photograph from the Welsh National Archives - a very

THE PHANTOM OF L.I.B.E.R.T.Y



Improvised Music (of the world)

atmospheric shot of an actual Malthouse, in Trefechan. That would have been a perfect setting for the making of this record, although it was actually recorded in a studio of the same name in Aberystwyth.

ED PINSENT

2:13 Music, 139 Gibson
Gardens, London N16 7HH

**Air Traffic
Controllers
Assistant to the
Assistant**
USA, PARALLELISM PAR003
CD (1999)

Existence Period
USA, PARALLELISM PAR005
CD (1999)

Last night I listened to a storm; howling rushes of insistent air buffeting against the house while trees bent and dogs barked. It went on for about two hours or so, peaking and troughing in intensity, occasionally sending out a belt of sudden rain to rattle against the window. Powerful, eternal and totally free.

In comparison, listening to Air Traffic Controllers now sounds like some poor bastard trying to start his car on a cold morning - it evokes a trace of sympathy for the effort involved but,

ultimately, it's just fucking annoying and you wish they'd give up.

Guitar and drums. Guitar and drums. On and on it goes. Such perverse minimalism can often bear fruit if the artist is TRULY committed to their vision. Sadly it seems ATC have read their reviews in *The Wire* and decided that this will do, why strain themselves eh? It's wank and a bad wank at that. Half hard, half drunk, head spinning as you flip through the mental jukebox for a fantasy that will suffice. You settle on some tired old scenario with Danni Minogue and set about the crank. It's surely an effort and you've even got time to ponder on how fucking pathetic and regressive this behaviour is - the shaved ape still aeons away from a moon landing. Insufficient chafing, nerve endings novocained by apathy and flat lager, it almost fails but then Danni finally shows some interest and a hot pointless release is achieved. All for nothing. That's what ATC sound like. Or, to be more precise:

if it's not Squarepusher beeps and squiggles (like the soundtrack to an Etch a Sketch) it's a track of total silence - ace! Or it's a bad pastiche of Radiohead's 'Creep' played by a particularly bored teenager who's starting to wonder if there maybe IS

something in this DJ lark. Meanwhile his annoying younger brother plays mogadon drums. Bad Eddie Van Halen impressions, a chimp hitting a tin cup against a desk, reverb fades in and out like an iron lung - hey I'm really rocking now! Saxophone and keyboards stumble in drunk and piss on the furniture, providing the mouldy sliver of bacon to this sad and limp looking double cheeseburger.

I've read the other reviews of this band - 'a gorgonizing assault of guitar(s) 'n' drums carpet bomb frenzy', 'glorious, crunchy loops of sound' and even 'humorous capriciousness' and I have to wonder if it's just me that doesn't get it? Is it concept rock? Is it some sort of highbrow joke? Or is it just bollocks? I'd like to picture drummer Claire Pannell suddenly stopping mid-thump, turning to her partner - guitarist Gerard Cosloy and asking, quite reasonably, 'this is bollocks ain't it?'.

Not that I think that will ever happen seeing as they are both totally lost up the artistic rabbit warren of their own arses to be able to see the dazzling daylight of The Truth.

What I want to know is: where is the passion? Where is even the slightest attempt to cover new ground? Where is the attempt to convey any sensation other than ennui?

I guess I should never expect all that much from a cluster of fools who decide to call themselves Air Traffic Controllers. What next - Refuse Collectors? Landscape Gardeners? Estate Agents?

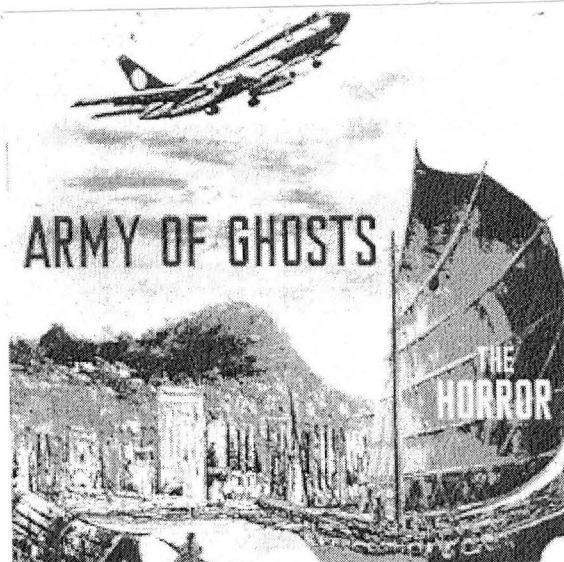
It's like punk never happened.

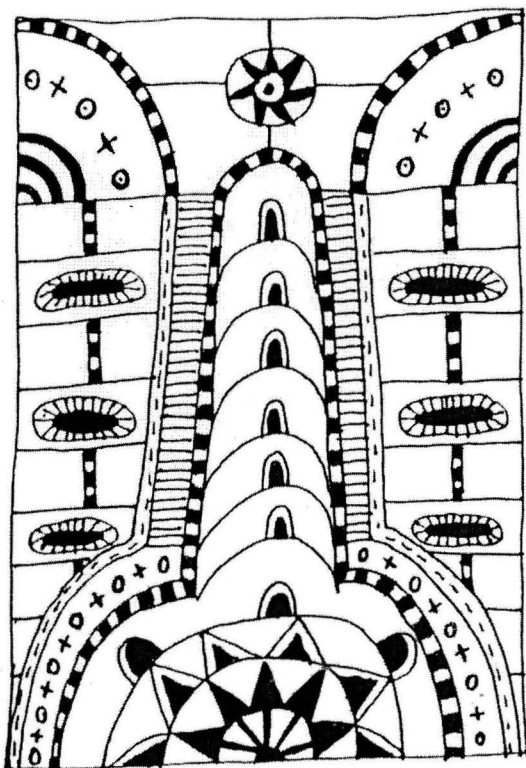
RIK RAWLING 31/01/2000

**Army of Ghosts
The Horror**

USA, PARALLELISM PAR004
CD (1999)

'The Horror', judging by the track titles and the packaging seems to be 'war' and, in particular, the Vietnam war. So





let's see what this Army of Ghosts has to say: Gunfire. Hi-Hat. Drunken monkey drumming. Alto sax bursts reminiscent of Zorn circa *Locus Solus* and occasional bursts of skronk but, ultimately, it goes nowhere and as a 'statement' against the myriad horrors of engaged combat is as profound as Culture Club's 'War is Stupid'.

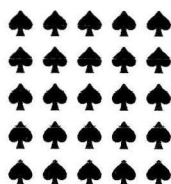
This is where the 'Avant-Garde' is most open to criticism from the more populist performers and critics alike - because this is unadulterated bollocks. Free jazz, the nearest recognisable 'style' employed here, has been done, done, done (and done well - check out Pharaoh Sanders) and has now become the last row of sandbags for the eternally talentless to hide behind. Quotes from Celine, such as: 'Behind all music one ought to try and catch that noiseless tune that's made for us: the melody of Death' are peppered throughout the booklet insert, along with doctored photos and inept faux-naive drawings that make your average 5-year old's doodles stuck to the fridge look like Salvador Dali. Meanwhile, one of the two men involved in this venture calls himself 'Brain Army' and he appears to have a tash that recalls 70s veteran porn star Harry Reems at his finest. All this may seem trivial and irrelevant but, believe you me, it's all there is to focus on when the music itself is so lost, so not there. On the surface it is just a boring

racket and beneath that it's still just a boring racket. Occasionally a disembodied voice floats into the mix to declare 'Everything is just piss'. And maybe it is.

With music like this I lose all faith in the more 'esoteric' end of the musical spectrum. It communicates nothing and, unlike Sun City Girls for example, it isn't even knowingly and entertainingly dumb. It's two guys in a studio, bereft of purpose or anything to say, going through the motions with the misguided conviction that if you're obscure enough some people will think you're profound. There are, I'm sure, people who will want to listen to this record but I think those people should ask themselves - how many more better examples of this type of music do you already have? And do you really need a weak imitation when you can just slap on some Pharaoh? Questions only you can answer.

RIK RAWLING 01/12/1999

Parallelism, PO Box 20132,
London W10 6ZA UK
www.parallelism.com



Phil Durrant and Alexander Frangenheim

Further Lock

GERMANY, CONCEPTS OF DOING COD002 CD

Two string-based improvisers - the UK violinist Durrant and the German bass player Frangenheim - lock antlers in the studio and produce 14 tracks during a mammoth 1997 session at Gateway Studios in London. They struggle hard to generate something of lasting worth, but ultimately this is a very cold recording, impressing with technique where it should convince with passion. The recording studio can beat the life out of improv; what is usually needed is a responsive and attentive audience to assist in coaxing a great performance from the players. Here, while the duo can manage to explore a good lock-groove exploration of a sawing drone on occasion, mostly you get these rather academic-sounding tweets and plucks which do little to take the listener out of the sterile environment. And a great shame too, as Durrant is one of our finest players and a man whose work should be cherished. Another clunker from Frangenheim's Concepts Of Doing label, and it comes in a pretentious arty package too

ED PINSENT

Mark Browne

Burning All Of My Back Pages

PRIVATE RELEASE CD-R (1999)

I honestly wish I could support Mark Browne in recommending this totally independent self-produced CD of his, but I've tried and tried and these tin ears of mine can find very little of lasting value in it. Browne is a fair to middling and mostly mediocre improvising saxophonist, and he proceeds to bore the life out of me with this 71 minute CD of eight indifferent tracks. All solo sax, all equally rambling, unfocused and incoherent musical non-statements, recorded in a uniformly flat, dead style. A couple of them come from live performances at the Red Rose Club in London from 1993 and 1994 - the rest are recorded in or around his home in Aylesbury. I'm astonished to find such a faceless and anonymous sound has any takers at all. Did anyone go and see him and actually enjoy being bored rigid? I'd love to hear from his fans.

ED PINSENT

Mr Browne alternates between the alto and the soprano saxophone for the eight recordings on this home-made disc. He plays live, without accompaniment or extraneous effects, and I would presume it's



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all improvised. The sounds he extricates from his tool are all over the shop like a mad woman's shit, to paraphrase Sir Les Patterson. Honking geese, plucking noises, armpit spawned squeaks and farts all emerge from the tapestry of sounds more immediately recognisable as coming from a saxophone, conjuring up the image of a cocaine-fuelled Bassett hound snuffling around in a park...for more than an hour. Were some enterprising Scandinavian animator to make one of those delightful films of such a thing, this could be the perfect soundtrack.

I'm trying to take something positive from the experience of sitting here listening to this. I must grudgingly concede a few points. It's nicely packaged in a jewel case with a plain cover of lumpy hand-made paper. It's well recorded, capturing the subtle nuances of the author's endeavours. He has chosen not to use effects or reverb, wisely preferring the instrument to speak on its own terms. I imagine this could be fairly compelling in a live setting, as the applause at the end of one track suggests, providing you like that sort of thing, and it doesn't go on for too long.

Unfortunately, that (for me) is as far as I can stretch it. *Burning All Of My Back Pages* just seems to go on and on and on without doing anything that might endear itself to these lugholes. I can't imagine why anybody would want to record this, let alone listen to it. I cannot picture Mr Browne admiring the finished disc that's just popped fresh from his CD burner, and saying to himself 'brace yourself world - here I come!' In fact I'd go so far as to say this is pointless ARSE that has no reason to exist. But then of course it would be a very dull world if we all liked the same thing, and who knows, perhaps it is really I who am the lumpen philistine. Mind you, I still say this is bollocks. If this all sounds rather promising to you, and you suspect me of having more in common with Garry Bushell than is proper for a contributor to this magazine, then you may order Mr Browne's sonic tour de force from the address that follows. Go ahead. Knock yourself out.

WAR ARROW

From 12 Spenser Road,
Aylesbury, Bucks HP21 7LR
markvbrowne@ukgateway.net



Mats Gustafsson The Education of Lars Jerry USA, XERIC XER-CD-100 CD (1999)

Aptly recorded in Chicago (which as you all know is known as 'The Windy City') here's a fine puffy one, in which Mats executes a perfect inhale, swells up his cheeks and makes like a bullfrog on his saxophone treated with electronic effects. Lowest-register notes contrast sharply with unbearable high-pitched tones. The smack and crack of his lips against the mouthpiece is exaggerated into a whacking percussive noise. His yawps and yelps are thrown into the mix but sound a like a man distressed rather than the whoops of one joyous to be playing. Testing times for all - it's kind of a gloomy record for all its spirited restless blowing and honking. Actually these are probably really modernist compositions than improvisations strictly speaking, as there's no real jazz feeling to any of it. If anything it could be the pieces are intended to back up the strange story in the sleeve which states that *The Education of Lars Jerry* is based on a true story by John Corbett. It's a joke. I'm already confused, but whoever wrote the six paragraphs within could, of course, be describing the making of this record in prose, using as many windy images as he can wrest from his word-processor's vocabulary: balloons, hissing radiators, a 'maniac wind', air conditioning, a fan...until you reach the hilarious punchline, which I won't give away. Further narratives are coded in the grey cover photograph of some pudgy



Lars Jerry. Saffies for vidare utbildning

schoolboy holding his trumpet, dressed for receiving some award...and the episodic nature of the track titles, which seem to suggest another story within a story regarding Lars and his windy adventures. Recorded by Jim O'Rourke in 1995.

ED PINSENT

PO Box 8172, Atlanta, Georgia
31106 USA
freemusics@aol.com

Alexander Frangenheim and Günther Christmann

alla prima
GERMANY, CONCEPTS OF
DOING COD001 CD (1998)

HANNOVER, EDITION
EXPLICO EXPL 007

My goodness, I'm out of touch. The last time I heard Günther Christmann was on a supremely ascetic double album on Bead, *Groups in Front of People* (1979). The featured ensembles sounded like a bunch of disaffected stocktakers in a somewhat depleted musical instrument shop. One of the more extreme examples of the record as document of live performance, where you can count the handclaps the sparse audience offer up after each piece and where the sound of an audience member exiting (I assume exiting) through a squeaky door is a rare sonic treat.

alla prima finds Christmann (trombone and occasional cello) in the company of bassist Alexander Frangenheim, playing 14 improvised duets for a little over an hour. These two make

for more racket than the entire 'Groups in front of people' crowd put together (door included). At times it falls away to what has been called by someone 'microprovisation', but mostly we're in the realms of near-silence and scratching punctuated by shrieks and bangs. During the 1980s I listened to free improvisation almost exclusively (with occasional breaks for English folk music), perhaps as a penance for placing too much in the ultimately self-defeating (even self-negating?), cul-de-sac experimentation kicked off by a handful of post-punk acts on the cusp of the decade (stand up Cabaret Voltaire, The Pop Group, Throbbing Gristle, Wire), perhaps to blank out all that sleek dross drooled over by the Gavin Martins, Ian Penmans and Paul Morleys of those times.

During the 1990s the sheer quantity of CDs of free improvisation overwhelms me - I'm at a loss to know where the growth of audience for this genre (implied by the increase in releases) resides - I don't see any movement from the grubby back rooms of pubs to major auditoria. It's now impossible to get to grips with the genre, or the musicians' intentions behind these releases - they could merely be there to document fleeting moments; they could be inviting us to treat them as immanent works of art; they may simply be an alternative source of income to gigging. Or all three. What I am certain of is that sheer quantity paralyses my listening. I know, I know - I don't have to listen to them all, it's simply that by throwing more of these releases at what is a perennially minority audience can do no more than alienate listeners from all but the 'tried and tested.' And even restricting oneself that way can lead to satiety: I don't care what *The Wire* might say about his next album, but with 30-odd recordings in my collection I don't need another Derek Bailey album. Right now, I don't whether I need *alla prima*. I really don't know whether it's good or bad, worth recommending or not. Sorry to disappoint you.

CHRIS ATTON

Concepts of Doing: Im
Schellenkonig 56D, D-70184
Stuttgart, Germany.



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PARTITAS
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Paul Panhuysen

SELEKTION

AKUSTIK

OPTIK



Paul Panhuysen
Partitas for Long Strings
USA, XI RECORDS XI 122 CD (1998)

Achim Wollscheid
Moves
GERMANY, SELEKTION SCD022 CD (1996)

Leif Elggren
Pluralis majestatis
SWEDEN, FIREWORK EDITION RECORDS FER 1010 CD (1999)

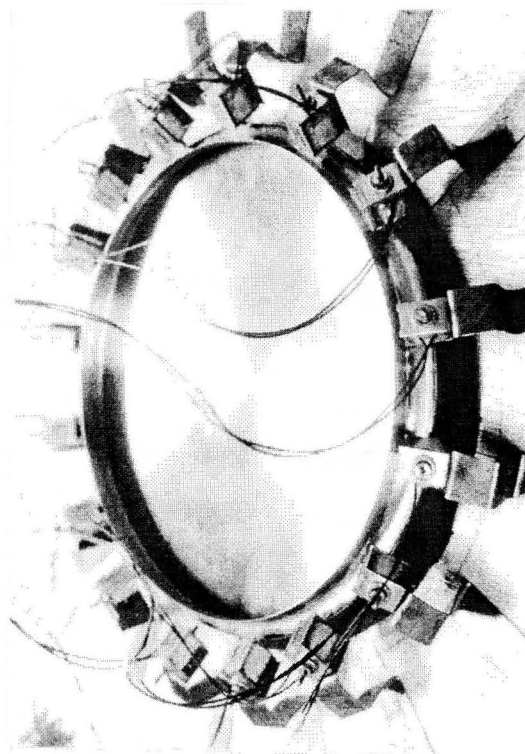
Three 'site-specific' works, these - and I'm sorry to open with such a pretentious sounding elitist term! These sound-artists, I assume, are concerned with generating sounds from a very specific environment and using very materialist methods. Paul Panhuysen does it with long strings of piano wire, as have Alvin Lucier and Terry Fox. Achim Wollscheid, the German installation artist, here partially realises his dream to 'play a house', making noises from familiar domestic objects in a deserted house. Leif Elggren records a CD's worth of bouncing around on a steel-sprung bed frame in an art gallery installation - and dreams he is underlining the crowned heads of Europe through his performance-action.

Panhuysen is a Dutch minimalist composer and installation artist, and he founded the Apollonhuis performance space and publishing house in Eindhoven. His string installations are vast affairs that are apparently as visually sumptuous as they are effective generators of uncanny sounds. Unknown to most of the educated Western world, he has installed and performed hundreds of his string experiments in carefully chosen environments all over the world. Some are out in the open, some are indoors in perfectly suited old buildings and barn-like spaces. He is thus unable to do anything wrong in my book and I'm delighted to welcome this record into my room. Naturally, in the conceptual art tradition, each of these installations is carefully documented - not that Panhuysen is like Richard Long who used to exhibit the documents of his walks (maps and boring photographs) in art galleries, which were a poor substitute for the mystical experiences he claimed to be undergoing during his methodically-planned actions. Panhuysen thankfully shares with us the recorded sounds of his work for the first time ever on CD, and the result for this end-user at least is 72 minutes of ecstatic, massive bliss. These are droning clouds of clustered chords, with an extremely loud and robustly full sound, and about as far removed from conventional music-making as you could wish for. Once he's set up the situation - a demanding enough job in itself - Panhuysen

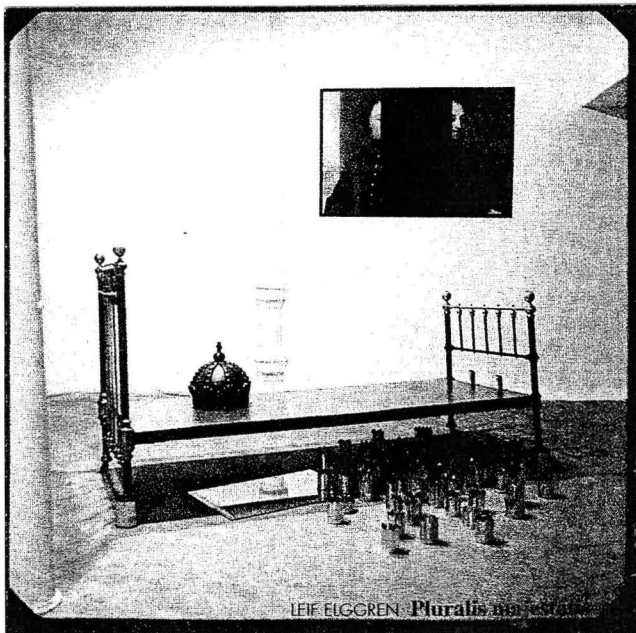
allows nature to take its course, and lets these uncanny voices speak for themselves. In only five minutes of listening, you will be awestruck, convinced you're hearing the voices of ancient gods given tongue for the first time. Utter transcendency.

On *Pluralis majestatis*, Leif Elggren's bedframe-bouncing antics start out gloomy - a regular squeaking rhythm prevails for the opening 10 minutes, which is too slow and joyless to have any remotely sexual connotations (such as in the famous scene from French movie *Delicatessen*, currently pastiched as a TV advert for Miller Lite). Rather it's meant to suggest the futile mechanical movements of a man who's lost his wits - which Elggren directs into a critique of royalty, pointing to a long history of clinical insanity amongst various kings and queens of history. 'In the history of lunacy monarchies feature far more frequently than they ever do in the rest of the world,' muses his sleeve-note. To illustrate this observation, the original gallery installation comprised a set of metal models - chess-piece figures with crowned heads arranged beside the bedframe on which loomed a larger, more imposing cast-iron black crown. Just as we always suspected - there's a madman in charge and the lunatics have taken over the asylum. This gloomy thought is underscored when the squeaking sound suddenly shifts up a gear and assaults you with amplified, industrial mode clanging and grating - the steel springs now sound like clanging chains against the hull of a battleship. At this point I realised the madness could start to infect the listener, and worried if I'd make it to the end with my faculties intact. Dare you take the challenge and risk a damaged cerebellum? Well, if you're only going to buy one record of a Nordic man jumping up and down on a squeaky bed this year, then this is certainly the one I'd recommend.

Achim Wollscheid's an austere conceptualist from Germany, and among other things was responsible for releases in the 1980s under the name S.B.O.T.H.I. I'm just putting out feelers into his work and I have a hard time grasping some of it, but the concept to this one is diggable. 'I had the idea to play a house,' is the headline to *Moves*, but the full-blown original idea was blocked by the sponsors. A shame, as it sounded far more interesting - he was going to wire up all 1400 windows of a warehouse in Frankfurt and make a living sound-art museum, everything framed within the parameters of an actual derelict space. This *Moves* CD is a scaled-down version of the concept. An entire range of domestic everyday objects are all wired up and played by clappers, miniature jackhammers triggered by computer software, amplified and mechanised to perform in this crazyhouse-turned-arthouse conceit. Cups and saucers, saucepan lids, knives and forks and chairs are among the mute objects given voice. Every episode grinds away mercilessly; the scrapes and shrieks which result are almost completely non-musical, the frequencies border on the unbearable, and the whole thing will test your endurance to new



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LEIF ELGGREN: Pluralis

limits. I've tried this a couple of times now - second time I had to play Tim Buckley as therapy - and sorry to report I find it disappointingly inert in the final analysis. The site-specificness of it (OK, the phrase comes from Achim) doesn't come over at all, despite what the artist claims. Nor indeed does the nature of the objects reveal itself in any new way. The chattering din is certainly intense, but it resolutely refuses to become music. Still, I half-admire the relentlessness of the structure, and the fact that Mr Wollscheid is determined to play the idea out to its conclusion, come what may. If I lived in a house of hell like this, I'd either be having nightmares about the walls swarming with clapper-playing termites, or in dread of a million hyper-active kids descending on me, all playing their tin drums at once. Yes - *Moves* is that good!

ED PINSENT

APOLOGY to Leif Elggren from last issue. We published a review of the Antitrade compilation (on Ash International) which wrongly stated that 'a deeply chilling female voice reading off numbers which might be a numbers station, or perhaps the speaking clock in another language' was part of a track by HHH. In fact it was by Leif, part of his track 'Mother!!!'

Achim Wollscheid

Acts

GERMANY, SELEKTION SCD028 CD (1999)

This is a fine sample collection of recent conceptual and gallery-based pieces by the German sound artist Wollscheid. Of the five works, my favourite - and perhaps the most excruciating to listen to - is called '4 x 2', and by process of overdubbing of a simple sine wave, it generates a whole series of complex tones. Refusing the sludge that normally comes with white-noise buildup, this work remains crystal clear from start to finish, and its razor sharp tones slice your head into fine fillets of red meat. Yep, this precision-crafted little beast grates on the eardrums something rotten, and (much the same as *Moves*, above) proceeds to inflict its aural torture in a merciless way until the entire terrible, inexorable structure of the work is played out. It was originally installed (in the late 1980s) at art galleries in Frankfurt, Munich and Paris until the health inspectors moved in and declared the work was actually illegal for human beings to listen to (just kidding about this bit). Working underground with recording engineer Peter Fey, Wollscheid found a way to transfer it to CD.



Walter Marchetti Nei mari del Sud. Musica in secca

ITALY, ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-M 9NMN.029 CD (1999)

This beautiful recording is an absorbing and astonishing work - and its genuinely unique sound is guaranteed to amaze you, in a delayed-action kinda way. Marchetti's 'piano englouti' is so muffled and treated that it sounds like it's being played thirty fathoms

below the surface of the ocean, by Captain Nemo dressed in his underwater breathing apparatus of seashells. There's no real connection, but this work is as mystical and elemental as another 'watery' masterpiece, *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars.

Two other good ones are 'Careful Inquiry' and 'And Piano'. Starting from a radical rethinking of the idea of 'documenting' performances of choral and piano music respectively, they both pick up and highlight great chunks of incidental ambient noises created by the performers and audience, and incorporate these 'accidents' into the finished work. Nothing much new there I suppose, but it works exceptionally well in this case to add extra interest to the otherwise rather dreary choral piece. The piano work by Monika Weiss is modified with transformers, making a delicious bonkers noise which harks back to the glory days of good old Stockhausen and his ring-modulation treatments of the piano of Aloys Kontarsky.

However 'Eye-Witness' is a bit of clunker in my view. Put simply it's a conceptual game that requires its performers to look at each other and clap their hands when they see their opponents blink. Through this action, Wollscheid seeks to question the nature of the relationship between performer and viewer, reducing it to two simple actions (ie the audience gazes, then applauds). The result, naturally enough, is a tedious series of amplified handclaps with no discernible pattern to them - going on for far too long. That said, I find that half of the interest with game-works like this is the fact that somebody managed to get it organised in the first place, persuaded the players to do it and then actually made the 'action' happen. I admire this personally because (as regular readers will know), I can't persuade my friends to meet someplace for a cup of coffee, even. The fact that the action took place is enough. Many of the documents that result from concept art are not always of interest and probably don't even have any aesthetic value, so perhaps they shouldn't be exhibited at all. 'Eye-Witness' is one such case.

'Ulysses' is the opening track and another laff-riot game piece like the one above. He managed to get over 1,000 German schoolkids to read one page from the James Joyce masterpiece (German edition, natch - he found a school where the number of pupils exactly matched the page count!). They all read aloud at the same time, and so get through the whole book in seven minutes - with a loud cheer at the end. I'm sure this is saying something rather critical about the rate with which we consume the abundance of information these days, because Joyce (whose prose is impenetrable enough to begin with) ends up reduced to a babbling pile of verbal rubble.

Add the spoken commentary by Cathy Milliken (which is also distorted through those fucking transformer boxes) and without doubt this is a fabbo and fun piece of original modern art - even the package is designed in an attractively weird way with holes cut from the cover, and unreadable texts scattered over a fold-out sleeve. Charly Steiger, through sleeve designs like this, wants to state that a Selektion release is far from being just another CD in the racks. Wollscheid may come over as a bit serious and humourless on occasion, but there's an underlying sense of absurdity to this work which I find somehow very engaging.

ED PINSENT

below the surface of the ocean, by Captain Nemo dressed in his underwater breathing apparatus of seashells. There's no real connection, but this work is as mystical and elemental as another 'watery' masterpiece, *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Gavin Bryars.

This is a bipartite work. *Nei Mari del Sud* was the first work, and it appeared in 1982 in an awesome installation setting. *Musica in secca* is the tagline that tips you off that this is a 1999 reworking of the first work, only now made possible through a computer programme which has enabled Marchetti to get the piano to deliver the sort of 'bichords' he requires. The 1982 work was a piece of 'acoustic theatre' to accompany a staged installation. I think it involved a stage set with a

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grand piano 'floating' in a blue tissue-paper ocean. The audience to this bizarre spectacle were treated to a series of weird tape events issuing from 12 loudspeakers. Clearly, the scale of this magnificent piano work is overwhelming, and the CD only offers a glimpse of what the whole thing would have been like. It's the residue washed on the shore after a massive battle at sea - even if it still is a beautiful thing to listen to.

Another lovely package from this very artistic-minded Italian label, which, with its usual commitment to excellence in packaging, includes great colour and black and white photos, impenetrable sleeve notes by Gabriele Bonomo, and a conceptual map print by the artist. In all a fine work from this veteran disciple of John Cage and homagist to Erik Satie. Find a copy of the *Suoni Dentro Suoni* double CD on Cramps Records if you want to hear a sampling of his earlier works from the 1960s and 1970s.

ED PINSENT

RLW

Tulpas

GERMANY, SELEKTION
SCD 024 5 CD SET
(1997)

Five hours pass like nothing when you spin this awesome and mammoth collection, believe me. An all-star cast of contemporary experimenters, sound-artists and noiseicians of all shapes and sizes pitch in to interpret the work of Ralf Wehowsky, aka RLW, who himself casts a fair-sized shadow across most of mainland Europe as an experimenter of no small mien. Well, the man first impinged on what's left of my consciousness with a singular release on Christoph Heeman's Streamline label, *When Freezing Air Stings Like Ice I Shall Breathe Again*, a recording so minimal I

barely knew it was playing apart from the whirring sound of CD inside my NAM. It had always been a firm favourite, succeeding in evoking a Winter's landscape so palpably that I regularly used it instead of going on that holiday to Helsinki every year. Saved me a fortune in air tickets, lemme tell ya...

When this monster slipped out of the envelope I fainted clean away at its daunting length, as any four-eyed wimp of my calibre would do. Yet I've found it surprisingly easy to thrust it into my artisanal orifice, despite its gargantuan proportions and the other difficult obstacles which a prospective listener might face. True, it's forbiddingly overly-intellectual, and in places po-faced to such a degree that it's practically a dark star clean out of the orbit of Planet Big-Yoks. No matter. There's such a variety here you'll forgive everything - there's noisescapes, drones, twidgets, icy blasts, groans, echoes, bewildering cut-ups, enveloping atmospheres, electric storms, white noise, silence, conceptual pranks, sound-poems and infinite twists and turns, so that it's an inexhaustible Palace of Varieties, an impossible library, a box of delights, and a science-fiction menagerie filled with alien beasts from all corners of the universe. To extract so many possibilities from a single artist's work takes some pretty formidable creative horsepower, I think you'll agree. Not even if fifty of the greatest Surrealists joined together in one sitting for a cosmic collaborative game of Cadavres Exquis would I be as impressed.

Actually this five-by-five motherfucker goes one step beyond the Surrealists. *Tulpas* doesn't bother to try and scramble common sense, sever the chains that shackle the imagination. It's coming from a far more high-minded position - it assumes the world is already as enlightened as *Tulpas*, that such extraordinary phenomena as communication between spirit worlds, time-travel and inter-dimensional warp flights are already part of our everyday lives.

Scarily, after five discs of submerging your mind and soul in this particular magical bath of icy quicksilver, you'll start to see the world this way too. Why wasn't it all obvious before? *Tulpas* proposes more than some glib, simplistic idealism to improve the world - it insists on acceptance of the deep mystery. You may see the face of God, yet!

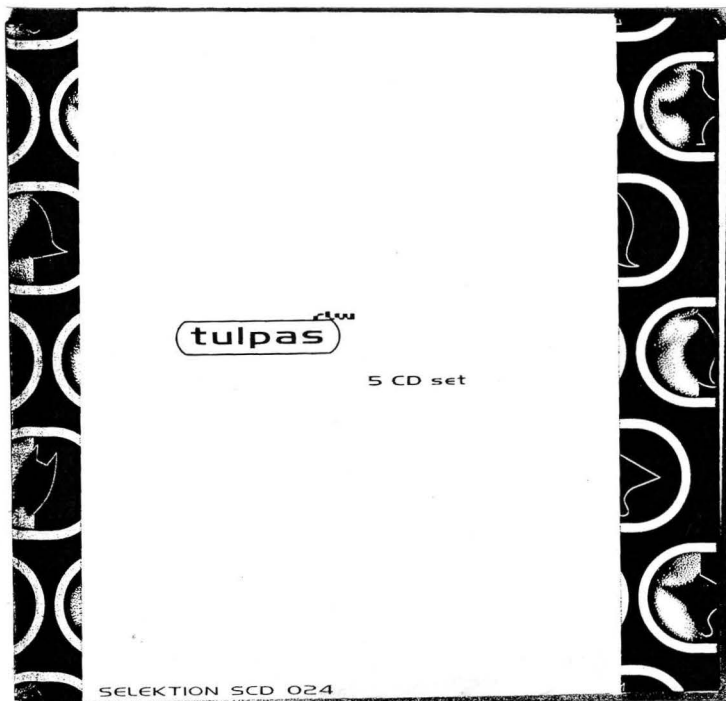
On the other hand, I wouldn't want to align myself one hundred percent with all the sentiments expressed herein. Take for example the pretentious Bruce Russell, who pompously claims on the liner notes that he has been a 'tulpa' for RLW. He refers to a Tibetan myth, which is how the collection got its title: a tulpa is a phantom emanation created by a mystic or magician to create his work for him. Russell may have many redeeming features, but then I've never heard the work of his highly-regarded band, The Dead C, so I can't talk. Also reckoned as collaborating tulpas are luminaries Merzbow, John Duncan, Asmus Tietchens, Christoph Heemann, Jim O'Rourke, Eric

Lanzillotta, Aube, Achim Wollscheid, Rehberg and Bauer, Ryoki Ikeda, Steve Roden, Noise-Maker's Fifes, and many more...But it would be pointless I think to dwell further on their individual tracks here, mainly because I haven't the time or space to do so, but also because the identities of the individual artists start to merge very quickly through the duration of the *Tulpas* trance-like sessions. This isn't to say it all bloody sounds the same throughout, but that the community spirit of collaboration prevails, and a new Utopia can be glimpsed through the many sound-windows. Horrors - an egoless world with individual identities melting away in a cosmic whirlpool? Now I'm starting to sound like a Buddhist...anyway I still recommend this set with a clear conscience to you all.

RLW indicated in *Resonance* magazine (Vol 6

No 2) how he is no stranger to recycling his own work, which he's always seen as being in a permanent state of flux anyway. If no work is really finished, why not invite other friends and respected artists to join in the job of reprocessing these works? RLW chose only those sound-artists whose work he respects and with whom he felt a certain affinity, and had no hesitation in surrendering the ownership of 'his' works to their individual working approaches. They could start reworking the structure, get inspired by the atmosphere of a piece, or just do a more or less straight remix. In line with these diverse approaches, not every artist got the same raw material to work with - they might have got a full description of the project and lots of source tapes, or just some print-out of musical scores. A fruitful period of collaborative communication followed, measured by the very precise RLW in the average number of letters or faxes he sent out to each artist! After large numbers of DATs had been exchanged in the mail - and some collaborators had come to Karlsruhe and worked on his hard-disk editing suite - RLW sat down and listened to everything. The decision to contextualise everything, through sorting the contributions under the five rather cryptic 'headings' and through some re-editing, has added extra punch to the entire project. [CD one] is seven interpretations of a single composition; [CD two] refers to a 'general idea of RLW'. [CD three] relates to present aspects of his work, [CD four] to earlier manifestations of RLW. [CD five] is more futuristic in approach, spinning out 'related conceptual dispositions, not to speak of other material and ideas already in the drawer'...sounds more like an I Ching reading than a sleevenote. Great package (by Charly Steiger) with book bound in and weird symbols instead of titles for the five discs. Two years in the making (1995-1997) and sure to be recognised some day for the timeless classic it already is.

ED PINSENT





Ectogram All Behind the Witchtower

ANKSTMUSIK CD 091 CD (2000)

Odd thing about the overused term 'psychedelic', how it's come to describe all manner of diverse music, from pop songs to dance-based beat tracks - this phenomenon was indeed noted (not by me, but by a proper journalist) in the mid to late 1980s when there were not a few underground-ish bands in the United Kingdom purporting to play in the psychedelic style; a time when Bevis Frond was in the ascendant, the *Rubble* series of UK pop-psych LPs was lovingly curated by Brian Hogg, dance beats were added to Jimi Hendrix solos on *If Sixties Was Nineties* and even chart acts like Primal Scream and Julian Cope were 'getting in on the act'. Since then, I suppose the phenomenon has either refused to go away, or we've developed to the point where 1960s music has become such a given of the musical vocabulary, that bands of the 1990s feel they can easily slip into the 'paisley mode' simply because they enjoy the music, without any self-consciousness or kitsch suggestions implied.

Which brings us to this engaging and entertaining record, from a trio of Welsh players. Why has Wales become a magnetic field of energy for emitting powerful psychedelic waves that draw many a looned youngster to its central core? Perhaps a combination of geographic and political features have made it an obstinate part of the United Kingdom, with undiscovered pockets of resistance lurking in its rural endroits, so that many forgotten cultural mores are retained there with tenacity. And, I gather, the youth culture in some remote Welsh urban wastelands centres largely around drugs anyway. Ectogram's Alan Holmes - a fine guitarist and multi-instrumentalist - has been associated with other bands of the Gaelic persuasion, including The Serpents and (perhaps slightly better known) Gorgy's Zygotic Mynai. The Ectogram's obstinacy extends to delivering a song 'Cyfan Gwbl', sung in the Welsh language, so they join distinguished company such as Datblygu (whom War Arrow knows about - see issue 5) and - if only I'd written down their name - a band who sung on an astonishing Trip-Hop record in Welsh, and had it played by John Peel more than once.

This *All Behind the Witchtower* CD has a lovely bright sound and should appeal to all lovers of a decent melody. The songs (especially the lyrics) don't do a lot for me, so this listener plumps mainly for the sound surface - the spaced-out trippy guitar solos, backwards-taped drums, sparing use of phase effect, and the liberal use of analogue electronic noises. The bewildering opening track 'Herald Speke' alone should be worth your entry money. The group have professed a desire to 'seriously fuck with peoples' heads', and to this end include their epic workout 'Spitsbergen 5' at the end (it's a strong track, right enough) and present their work within a lavish full-colour booklet crammed with Photoshop-treated chromatic images that are straight out of the psychedelic cliché catalogue. Full marks for effort, but these guys are too fey and whimsical to venture any further out of the psychedelic candy-store. If you want to hear some genuinely nasty examples of badly fucked-up acidheads, then listen to Mad River's first LP - then let's talk!

ED PINSENT

*The Old Police Station, The Square, Pentraeth, Ynys Mon, Wales
LL75 8AZ
www.ankst.co.uk*

MODERN PSYCHEDELIA

...and any band willing to accept the
ridiculous term 'Space Rock'?

Orange Can The Engine House

REGAL REG36CD, CD (1999)

I used to work with a couple of blokes who were in a band, the brothers James and Jason Aslett. Although I heard little of their music, the ideas sounded quite exciting, and I could appreciate their frustration with the crazy world of showbiz. Whilst holding down the same crap job as myself, and getting up at 4.30 AM to do so, they went through periods of ferocious gigging, sacking egotistical spare wheels, hiring new members, meeting big musical cheeses and so on. Eventually things started to come together. They decided on the name Orange Can, which caused mild amusement in the work place, with suggestions of corny album titles, *Freshly Squeezed* and the like, being bandied around. One day, their thrusting high powered manager, after a few non-starters, found them a record deal and they were off. They chucked in the crap job, and started to turn up in big music papers to generally favourable reviews. The worst said something like 'this will probably be massive but that's because you lot are stupid'. The others said 'next big thing' and suchlike. This five track CD came out just before Christmas, a holiday which James Aslett finds deeply depressing, so he once told me. He explained that this was because one year his uncle had hung himself on Christmas day. A little shocked, I expressed my condolences. 'Yes, it was terrible,' he continued, 'we couldn't take him down until the 5th of January'.

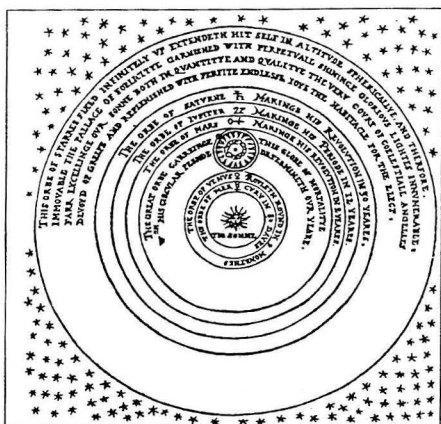
See. You just don't get that sort of attention to detail in the big crappy mags that are starting to take an interest in the Aslett brothers, particularly as these corporate rags are just looking for the next - God help us - Travis or Stereophonics, a role to which Orange Can, happily, are not musically well suited. What with my general ignorance of da boyz beyond a social context, my greatest fear was that this EP would be rubbish, and I'd have to resort to whining something about how I could see a lot of work had gone into it. But praise be, it ain't so. They've been rather lazily compared to The Stone Roses, which is a pretty superficial assessment, and doesn't do much in the way of justice. There's a subtle

psychedelic undercurrent going on in the chord sequences and the understated drifting vocals, but there's more to it than just that. At times it goes all Led Zeppelin without the big rock production sound, effortlessly propping its way from this into slide guitar-powered *Deliverance* soundtracks, and back again. Outside of Faust - particularly *Faust IV*, which bits of this remind me of - this isn't the sort of thing I'd generally listen to, probably because so little of it is done with Orange Can's consummate skill and passion, choosing instead to rely on being up front and obvious in its necrophilic intentions towards the music of an earlier decade. This just sweeps you away on a gentle wave of watercolour acoustics, half-hidden sound effects, occasionally cloudbursting into 'rock rifferama'



The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

The Mooseheart Faith Stellar Groove Band



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Nimbus 2000

(© Tommy Vance 1982). I hope Orange Can make it huge, as has been forecasted. Aside from the prospect of lucrative scoops like 'Jason Aslett laughed as he told me he relaxes by drowning kittens', which I'll be taking to the *News Of The World* as soon as the time and money are right, it would make a nice change for mainstream success to play host to a half decent band, by way of a change from the usual case of tone-deaf artistically barren indie tossers. *The Engine House*, rather than being the debut which sets a peak that will never be revisited, sounds like it's only scratching the surface of the great innovations that will presumably unfold when the album comes out.

WAR ARROW

The Magic Carpathians Project
Nimbus 2000, Hunting for the Ogoopogo
OGGUM OG6 33 RPM 7" VINYL SINGLE (1999)

Electroscope
Wee Baldy, North Utsire, South Utsire
Longstone
ST567897/543913
OGGUM OG4 45 RPM 7" VINYL SINGLE (1999)

The Mooseheart Faith Stellar Groove Band
The Face on Mars
Nimbus 2000
Wojzeck
OGGUM OG8 45 RPM 7" VINYL SINGLE (1999)

Three 7-inch split records from the Lampeter-based Oggum label, run by the ever-ready Ruth and Daffyd who also record as *Sound Proj* favourites Our Glassie Azoth and Alphane Moon. On these split records, the music is mostly a series of inconclusive electronic instrumental episodes that sparkle for two minutes and then dissipate in the ether, like some unknown astral phenomenon. Though the creators involved are clearly in debt to a lot of 1970s and Kosmische music, the residual feeling we're left with is also very psychedelic. The pressings are all in candy-coloured vinyl (one of them looks like a big orange Spangle, if anyone remembers those famous sweets), arrive issued in photocopy sleeves adorned with Daffyd's beloved alchemical imagery, and are distributed by someone at Cargo they managed to befriend...as close as anything comes to the small-press comic ventures I once used to support, these nifty Oggum singles are an object lesson in making presentable, but affordable, DIY records which everyone could learn from.

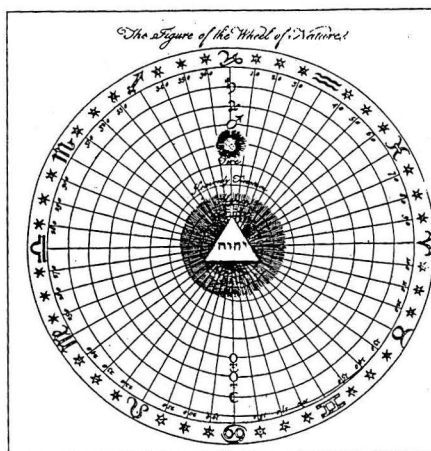
Electroscope are Gayle Harrison and John Cavanagh from Mount Florida in Glasgow, whence they operate their own little Melodybar business and will gladly sell you more of their available product if you write to them. They squeeze two short tracks onto their side, of which the second is an accordion-based hymn to the Radio 4 shipping forecast. T'would be just perfect for a maritime film such as *Longitude* with Michael Gambon. Longstone were last heard of *Surrounded By Glass* on their full-length recording for Ochre records, and this track shows they're still very keen on paying musical tributes to Cluster and Kraftwerk. A minimal 2-note melody is set against a grandfather-clock rhythm, gradually losing out to the bubbling and keening electronic noises that climb to the front of the mix. The track disappears in a mass of reverb, not really knowing how else to end. It's a pleasant series of noises, but lacking a decent structure the track comes over as unfocused.

The Magic Carpathians Project is actually Atman, the Polish semi-improvising band whose *Personal Forest* CD was a big winner with modern hippies a few years ago. This slice of 'ethnocore deathfolk splurge', recorded live at a festival in Poland, sustains the tension all the way through - even where the musical links are so tenuous they're in danger of getting lost once or twice. Played mostly on acoustic instruments, it's a scary drug-trip freakerootie with rattling percussion, phased guitar drones and angry barking vocals driven home by inept snare drum phrases. The second half depicts the druggies coming down from the trip, and almost sounds like a snide pastiche of what a cynic would expect rare 1970s progressive rock LPs to sound like, all mad echoing voices gibbering over a slow guitar music beat. Very fine.

The Mooseheart Faith Stellar Groove Band stand out a mile here - it's a psychedelic song! The Oggum people declare this is about the most catchy song they will ever do - let's hope they leave any more of this kind of nonsense in the can. Martians and telescopes feature in the silly lyrics, while a stylophone riff, nondescript lead guitar and limp singing feature in the flat production. Pretty dull. Nimbus 2000, on 'The Ogoopogo', combine a fey storytelling episode with a layering of lovely electronic rhythms and *Tomorrow People* styled sounds - could be they're real 1970s television-warped children. Near the end there occurs a slightly-echoed piano fragment that is simply iridescent - the musicians are experiencing a near childlike-joy in making this record. This particular track combines a few twists and turns and is about the most 'developed' track in this Oggum batch, with more of a discernible episodic structure to it than some of the other pleasant, but drift, pieces of electronica. Their 'Wojzeck' cut veers a bit towards the woollier side, but there are some nice sounds and they're placed together with a certain deliberation to great effect. Nimbus 2000 are an Anglesey-based band debuting on vinyl here, and are part of the Welsh underground scene - see for example, last issue's *The Serpents You Have Just Been Poisoned* CD, and anything on the Ectogram label.

ED PINSENT

Magic Carpathians :: Nimbus 2000

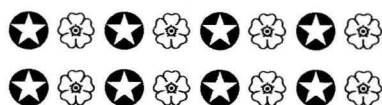


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Hunting for the Ogoopogo

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000



Various Artists

Infrasonic Waves Volume III

OCHRE RECORDS OCH036 7" VINYL
EP (1999)

Infrasonic Waves Volume IV

OCHRE RECORDS OCH037 7" VINYL
EP (1999)

VOLUME III

1. UCM: 'Versuchmodell I'
2. Girisu-Jin Futari: 'Understanding Large Numbers'
3. Mount Vernon Arts Lab: 'Broadcasting'
4. Yellow 6: 'One'

The third of 4 volumes that make up the *Infrasonic Waves* 7" EP series and limited to only 500 copies. That's what the press release says. It also promises 'Space Rock delights'. Oh shit, I haven't even put it on the turntable yet.

Hang on, this first one sounds OK. Like early 80s new wave - they've got that Martha and The Muffins guitar sound down to a tee and...wait a minute, I'm playing it at the wrong speed. Here we go, 33rpm and now it sounds like a bad copy - or perhaps it's a 'homage' - to early Mogwai. Yep, they've even got that spoken word sample in there - some croaky old French bloke this time. Irrelevant, but not as poor as Girisu-Jin Futari. This could be Squarepusher or Aphex Twin at their laziest - leaving the gadgets squeaking away to themselves while they pop out for some fags. Behind the modem bleeps some synth floats in and gives it some shades of Autechre for a while but I'm afraid this is going nowhere. Ends suddenly, obviously.

Side 2 starts with what sounds like the fire alarm at work as heard while wearing a motorbike helmet. This is the kind of mellow moment Merzbow drops in amidst the thunder but here it's been drawn out for an entire track. Perfect for a 'scary' scene in those films where teenagers have sex, pop culture discussions and then die. Oh, hang on, just got an engaged tone there. What are this lot playing at? Mount Vernon Arts Lab should be frying chips at car boot sales.

Yellow 6...get off to a good start. Like Immense (from Bristol) they're clearly inspired by Mogwai but seem determined to stretch the established formula. Bolstering the pleasant New Order-style jangle is shuddering jolts of 'trip hop' at its most emphatic. There's a strong sense of control and drama and not a little John Barry in there. The rhythm is soon lost amidst a monsoon of feedback but Yellow 6, despite a crap name, have come out on top.

VOLUME IV

1. Five Way Mirror: 'A Break in the Clouds'
2. Pulsar: 'Natural Selection'
3. Arparp: 'Remodel/Redial'
4. Star Phase 23: 'Delay Song'

With Volume 3 boasting only one track worth getting out of the bath to answer the

door for it doesn't bode well as I tentatively drop this sliver of vinyl onto the turntable.

Track 1 is 'Five Way Mirror' - the side project of Greg from Violet Glass Oracle (c'mon!) and the revered Windy & Carl. The whole point of side projects, to me, is to be able to explore other aspects of your muse without upsetting the audience you've gained with your established and recognised style. Windy & Carl do minimalist breathy drones and windborne gusts of nothingness - so you'd think that here they'd go and let rip with some thrash jazz or hardcore G-rap shit but what do you get...what sounds like the old lady upstairs Hoovering again. Word up - Thomas Köner has been there and done this already and his shit loosens your fillings when played at a sufficient volume. This, in comparison, is like putting a Snickers Bar next to a much missed Marathon. You know what I mean.

Pulsar - another side project. This time it's one of the dudes from...a 'space rock' outfit called The Land Of Nod! What the fuck is going on? If these guys have got so much free time on their hands they should put in for some volunteer work. There's lots of needy causes out there who need help. Meanwhile, we don't need anymore of this diluted Slint. If you've got 'Spiderland' then play that instead.

Star Phase 23 are fucking shit. Hold your stereo speakers close to your TV until you get that annoying bowel deep buzz that sounds like a Stuka is about to dive bomb your house. Then turn on your PC, click on IE5 and wait for the modem beeps. Put them together and you've got Star Phase 23. This is music for Daleks.

Arparp - sounds like someone tampering with Roy Montgomery's master tapes. What appears to be a badly tuned ('prepared') guitar is strummed against a wind tunnel howl. That's not to say it's a bad track - it builds in intensity and volume as it progresses and evinces a boldness of approach sorely missing from the previous 3 tracks. Perhaps there's a bit of Bowery Electric in there and maybe Godspeed You Black Emperor! during one of their shorter incidental pieces. Easily the best on this EP - full on, focused and mildly disquieting.

So, out of 2 EPs you get 2 good tracks and a load of old bonk besides. I've not heard Volumes 1 and 2 but based on this evidence I'm willing to suggest that some judicious editing could have produced one corking EP. Less is sometimes more.

RIK RAWLING 01/02/2000

Ochre Records, PO Box 155, Cheltenham,
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SubArachnoid Space and Walking Timebombs

The Sleeping Sickness

ELSIE + JACK RECORDINGS EAJ004
CD (1999)

SubArachnoid Space are an American space-rock band led by Mason Jones, and I gotta confess they have made me yawn before with their rather dull, meaningless

spacey jams which I've heard on Release Records, but here - while not fully recanting - I admit their lengthy approach to the art of music-making starts to seem more acceptable, convincing even. There are numerous clichés in the genre of space rock - chiming guitars, lots of pedal effects, uncertain bass lines and even more uncertain percussion - but these stumbling blocks are eventually overcome by the SubArachs, and sometimes even transformed into good music. This is partly due to the clear sound on this recording, achieved by the production skills of cross-over member Scott Ayers, who (on this occasion, at least) plays guitar in the band but also makes more abstract noises in his Walking Timebombs guise - and I'm still a big fan of the wildly primitive CD he made with Tribes Of Neurot (see issue 4). But I must also concede that for a good 60% of the time, the SubArachnoid ones are contributing some decent playing, even if they take a long time to get there - when they finally arrive they lock into a druggy, intensive jam with a hypnotic rock beat that ultimately wins you over. The limitations are overcome and this becomes a compelling listen, more than simply 'teenagers painting with sludge and sound' as the sleeve legend boasts. Boiled down from live performances recorded in 1996.

ED PINSENT

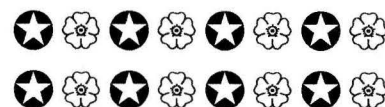


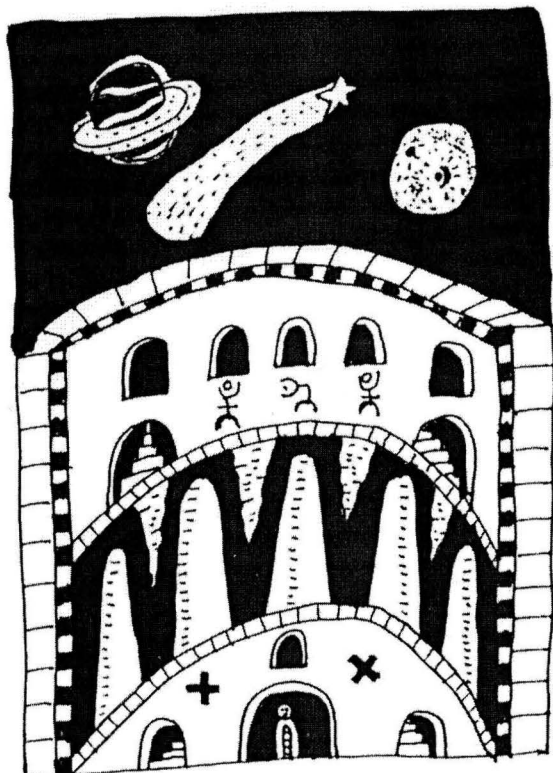
September Plateau Occasional Light

ELSIE + JACK RECORDINGS EAJ005
CD (1999)

Very pleasant and listenable instrumental excursions here, a solo studio recording project from 1997 made by C Jeely, the man behind Accelaradeck who has also had a release or two on Enraptured. Mostly he deploys treated guitars, to blow out gaseous billows of rather airy and driftly melodies - melodies without any real tune or centre to them - floating over a very strong rhythm track. In some cases the percussion noises - processed woodblocks, or an electronic version - are so upfront as to be a major distraction. Other tracks, without the drum machine, work a lot better and allow you to concentrate more on the construction and studio artistry at work; there are a lot of layers, added riffs, overdubs and instrumental tonal washes. Not a single one of these tracks really goes anywhere, but the overall effect is pleasant enough, and they never outstay their welcome. The titles - 'Coast Collapsing', 'Thinking Of Storms', and 'Glacial Kiss', accompanied by the sunlit seashore cover photos, tend to confirm the feeling that this isn't much more than a musical book of watercolour views - but these are pretty picture postcards none the less. If you ever had a secret liking for Camel, that pseudo-cosmic proggy band from the 1970s, (own up!) then this might be the one for you.

ED PINSENT





Various Artists

Monsters, Robots And Bug Men: A User's Guide to the Rock Hinterland

VIRGIN RECORDS AMBT11 2 X CD (1996)

Virtually any band willing to accept the ridiculous term 'Space Rock' as a description of their music is featured on this excellent 2 CD compilation, originally released in 1996 by Virgin Records (also responsible for the legendary *Cosmic Kurushi Monsters*). As with all compilations there are no shortage of duff tracks but the better ones are SO good that they simply cancel out the shite.

It could be argued that Disc 1 peaks early with Bardo Pond doin' some 'Tantric Porno'. Like many bands these days Bardo Pond are committed to playing endless variations on the same until they get it out of their systems and go back to their day jobs - the only difference being that 'the Pond' are worth listening to while they do it.

Proceedings quickly take a dive though with Long Fin Killie who are musically up for the job but have made the fatal error of employing a whining student tosspot for a vocalist. With lyrics as poignant and incisive as a Julie Burchill column it plays out like Gene doing a Spacemen 3 tribute - that bad. Onwards and upwards with the always interesting Third Eye Foundation - 'Sleep' is nothing less than a hurricane trapped in a box

where it howls and shudders and hammers the listener's senses with debris and Force 10 feedback. For nearly seven minutes. Awesome. Elsewhere there's Bowers Electric providing 'Slow Thrills' - a long midnight drive in a big truck on an empty road. Walls of reverb build forever while a young girl sings nursery rhymes to calm her fears. Brise Glace has the unmistakable slouch of pre-Eureka pop lunacy Jim O'Rourke and goes nowhere, overstaying its welcome and spilling its drink on your rug. Pram are lost in an opium haze with only Trevor Horn to help them find the way out. Magic Hour are generic 'indie' Yank

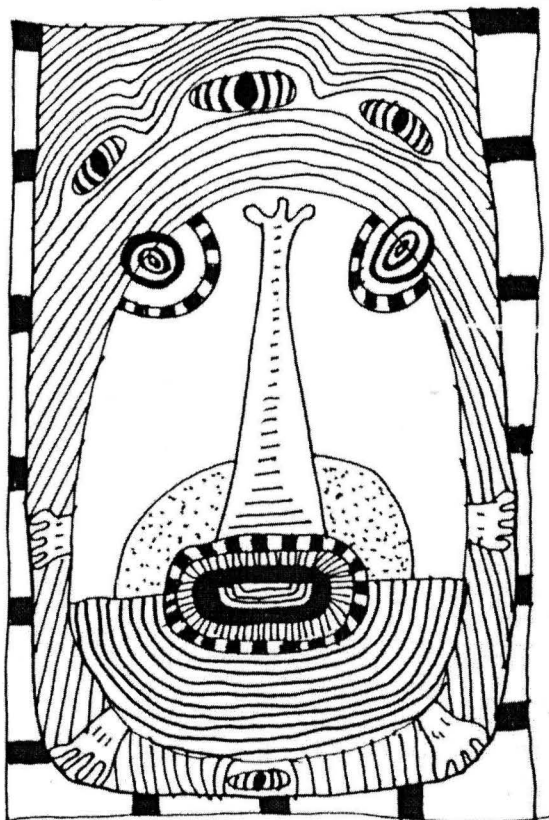
dullards with their sights firmly set on a bus shelter in the rain. Labradford dredge up a continuous stuttering guitar screech with spartan Mogwai-esque chords and a mumbled lyric of towering pointlessness. A mood of quiet desperation is maintained throughout and it's a good enough place to leave the listener wanting more from Disc 2...

...which gets off to a really bad start with Mercury Rev. Inexplicably championed by a music press lost at sea without the reassuring buoy of Oasis to cling to, their last album was a depressing bundle of gimmicks and 'Prog Rock' indulgences that should've been treated with the contempt usually reserved for Megadeth or Celine Dion. The track here 'Everlasting Arm' is from their early days and it sounds like a *Sesame Street* song loaded with bad acid - unlistenable. What else? Flying Saucer Attack do their thing and do it well, Jessamine bore like

Melvyn Bragg and Windy and Carl rip off Roy Montgomery something chronic. Godflesh do a 15-minute Rob Zombie pastiche that is completely unacceptable while those weapon-grade twats Stereolab continue to get away with it. It's all starting to go disastrously wrong until the previously unheard Sabadon Glitz deliver 'The Lonesome Death of Elijah P. Wood' which is Ennio Morricone with a didgeridoo and some gadgets that buzz, evoking a fine meld of the past of possible future as imagined by Hollywood. US Maple (the worst live band I've ever seen) threaten to ruin everything but fuck off after less than two minutes which is OK with me. Space Needle close proceedings with a Velvet Underground pastiche that does no wrong. There's also a hidden track that turns out to be Stars Of The Lid - the sound of steady rain falling and resonant surges of synth like sunlight breaking through the clouds, which is probably the only way to finish it.

With great packaging - neon blocks and kids' doodles, sci-fi comic cut and paste and the ubiquitous 50s Americana - this is one great compilation spread too far and tainted by the art school drop outs who see 'doing Post Rock' as a viable alternative to slopping out lattes in Starbucks. Some Witchfinder General-style editing could have made this into something special. As it is we have to rely on the CD remote to weed out the undesirables - whether they are the Monsters, Robots or the Bug Men is up to you.

RIK RAWLING 14/12/1999



People Like Us Hate People Like Us

STAALPLAAT STCD126 2 X
CD (1999)

People Like Us Meet The Jet Black Hair People...in Concert!

BELGIUM, AUDIOVIEW
AUDIO005 CD (1999)

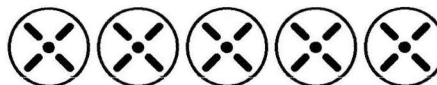
These issues are a couple of fine gems rendered in what we are obliged to term the Plunderphonic mode. Let PLU speak for itself in the attached interview. Just gotta tell you these massively enjoyable records are delirious, intoxicating and deliciously funny. Both funny amusing and funny peculiar. PLU work mainly with found voices, seamlessly edited with gaps, repetitions and elisions so as to swiftly undermine any common sense. But far from resulting in scrambled nonsense, these treatments make the voices say things they didn't mean in the first place. The simple erasure of a negative, the insertion of a rude word from another source, or the repetition of some commonplace phrase - all of these work as devastating tools of satire. As regards satire, you get the fairly familiar send-ups of advertising and radio jingles, you get strange stories, litigants in dismal legal cases, foreign language learning records, and what have you - all woven together into a rich and wonderful send-up of the absurdities of contemporary society. On the other hand, an even more powerful tool is the simple loop-trick: something heard first time which was embarrassing enough, becomes excruciating on the second listen and sheer agony on the third...PLU quickly exposes the stilted qualities and utter banality of everyday speech, and the broken-off dialogues curling back on themselves suggest, finally, the total impossibility of real communication. Bleak...yet funny at the same time.

The effect is doubled and then some when it's played against the music backdrops - which include some of the cheesiest and sick-making easy-listening LPs ever committed to vinyl in

Cut & PASTE

PEOPLE LIKE US THE TAPE BEATLES EXTRACTED CELLULOID

Strange Cutting and Editing Plunderphonics



the name of popular commercial entertainment. These 'Incredibly Strange' records are, like the voices, sabotaged - no sickly musical moment is left untouched before it's minefielded with a heavy-metal feedback solo or glitched mercilessly by tape cuts, CD skips and endless loops, repetitive strategies that carefully reveal the essential inanity of this kind of Oxfam-shop trash music. In all, each track is a gigantic 'cookie full of arsenic' (to quote Clifford Odets' *The Sweet Smell of Success*), each listening moment is barbed with a witty edit which slices into you as precisely as a stiletto.

Hate People Like Us is a double CD of remixes of all her deleted records, executed by such people as Cyclobe, Farmers Manual, Christoph Heemann, Death In June, Mika Vainio, Coil, Felix Kubin, Boyd Rice and many others. It starts off kind of wacky on the first disc, but soon spirals into darker territory as the shadow of disc two eclipses it. The collaboration one is with a guy from Negativland, with whom she is often compared. But People Like Us are far more fun.

ED PINSENT

The Tape-Beatles Good Times

THE NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT STCD 136 CD (1999)

The back cover image for this CD is a 50s Americana advertising image featuring an almost-orgasmic housewife fondling some weird looking cleaning appliance. Track titles include: 'Beautiful Necessity', 'Success Through Vibration' and 'Byways of Ghostland'. The band are called The Tape-Beatles. Hmmm, I think I already know what this record is going to sound like.

And, fuck me, I'm not wrong! Much as I expected you get muffled TV sounds while someone with a headache tunes a radio, samples of self-help tapes, interview cut-ups, children reading out loud, opera singers warped into wolf howls, drums on reverb. It's your every day plunderphonic raid on the detritus of popular culture laid over Fisher Price drumbeats, James Brown grunts, trumpet bursts, Last Night of the Proms, fist fight sound effects, car chase tyre screeches, broken glass, explosions, fireworks. Movie trailers, sci-fi laser blasts, drums, drums, fucking drums.

It all sounds like 6th formers with a sound rig paid for on Dad's credit card, pissing about in the bedroom, high on Sunny D and hoping this all makes some 'comment' on work culture, media lies and the numbing adult world they are about to enter. If it is adults doing this then they obviously don't get out much, creating their narrow reality tunnels from the signals they receive via the satellite dishes in their backyards. Essentially this is Negativland with no sense of humour and a lot less range. What may have once sounded 'cutting edge' is now simply a parody of itself. Paul Hardcastle's 'Nineteen' was more potent than this and that was 15 years ago for fuck's sake! Don't give up the day jobs fellas!

RIK RAWLING 01/12/1999

Staalplaat, PO Box 11453, 1001 GL Amsterdam, The Netherlands
www.staalplaat.com

Contact The Tape-beatles at:

Public Works Productions, PO Box 3326, Iowa City IA52244 USA
www.soli.inav.net/~psrf

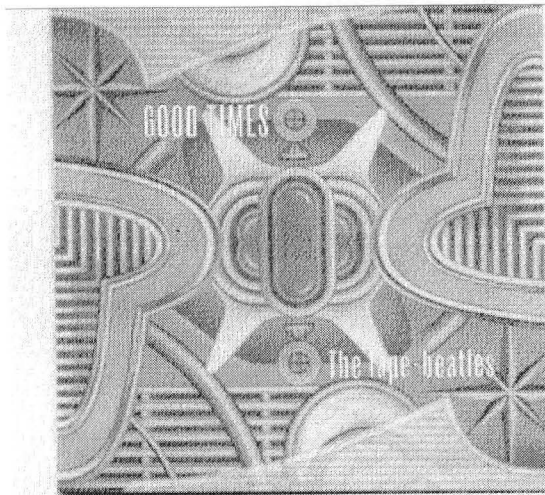
Various Artists Extracted Celluloid

USA, SEELAND RECORDS 509CD / ILLEGAL ART 002 CD (1999)

An excellent record very much in the Negativland tradition, if we can have a tradition that's a mere 20 years old...here be cut-ups and sonic layerings that will amuse and entertain you, while at the same time prove extremely worrying and subversive. 20 tracks by 19 different artists, yet the message in every instance seems to be pretty much the same - the modern world is completely insane. In fact it's not only insane but



The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000



completely out of control, everyone's intention is malicious, and modern life is filled with peril - not just the obvious menaces, but more subtle dangers that you know next to nothing about. This record aims to pull aside the veil of civilisation, and reveal the chaos that lurks at the heart of all our absurd activities. At the same time, it shows us the prison bars that remind us there is no chance of escape from our self-made jails, Death Row is our ultimate destination and the Governor's reprieve won't get through in time.

But hey - don't get depressed, because the Illegal Art folk want us to laugh at life as well! This is a darn fine entertaining CD, especially in the places where it pokes remorseless fun at popular culture. TV, movies, and MOR pop records are all fair game to these wicked sound-artists - and the tricks of sampling, looping, repeating, backwards-masking and speeding up all of these sources are very familiar to us by now, part of the basic grammar of subversive record-making for which Negativland helped write the Primer. They are being done exceptionally well here by the way, in a manner that makes chart hit record with a TV sample on it look pretty soppy. The Illegal Art mafia, I suspect, both love and hate these popular sources, which they celebrate and massacre in one and the same breath - often on the same record! It's a heady brew for the listener, who is pulled and pushed every which way but loose. These records never let you off the hook; you don't know where to put yourself and you can't simply sit there soaking it all up like a sponge.

More than simply challenging our assumptions about everyday culture - be it a Sergio Leone western or a Kung Fu movie - this kind of record rips those assumptions to pieces, and tramples over the gutted bodies with hob-nailed boots. By extension, our assumptions about everything else (our lives, our jobs, haircuts, clothing, friends and belief systems) are also called into question. Who's controlling us, and making monkeys of us all? Through cut-ups and varispeed, virtually all human speech on this record is either completely torn out of context, or immediately transformed into gibberish; after 30 minutes of listening, the gibberish becomes the new language. The William Burroughs nightmare has come true.

Are there really 19 artists making records like this in America? Could they instead be aliases for the same members of Negativland? When I read a list of names that contains Andrew Q Hayleck, Pine Tree State Mind Control, Pedro Rebelo and Spacklequeen, I'm reminded of the *Devil's Dictionary* and Ambrose Bierce's superb set of aliases for his wholly fictitious poets and philosophers, such as Fr Gassalasca Jape, Joel Frad Bink, Narany Off, Aramis Loto Frope and Joel Spate Woop...if you're not familiar with that book, I recommend it. Also this fine CD. Let me know if you have any success ordering it...I somehow doubt if they secured permission to use a single one of these samples (what outlaws!)

ED PINSENT

Seeland Records, 1920 Monument Blvd, MF-1, Concord CA 94520 USA
www.detritus.net/illegalart



YO LA TENGO

And then nothing
turned itself inside
-out

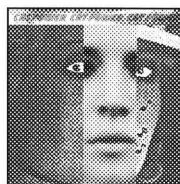
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CAT POWER

The Covers Record



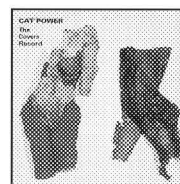
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Nocturnal Emissions Interview by WAR ARROW

The announcement opposite first came out of my speakers in 1983, courtesy of *Viral Shedding*, the fourth album by Nocturnal Emissions. This was a group who had first appeared just as Throbbing Gristle imploded, and thus, along with Test Department, Konstruktivists, 400 Blows and others, were saddled with the 'Industrial' tag. They were all a bit noisy you see. Nocturnal Emissions' first few releases could almost have been recorded directly off the shop floor at Fords, were it not for the subtle suggestion that there was a lot more going into this music than just amplified noise. Around the time of *Viral Shedding* it seemed like everybody had learnt that their synths could approximate dance music, so beats and melodies were creeping in, but of the whole bunch, Nocturnal Emissions produced the only album that made a truly dirty funky noise. This was not Sheffield synth-pop. If earlier tracks like 'LD-50' represented the horror of the animal labs where unspeakable experiments were carried out in the name of eliminating bodily odour, the difference was that now they'd got James Brown strapped into the Shampoo tester. It was an incredible album, and far more listenable than I may have just implied, not least because of how radically different it sounded compared to earlier works. Yet it remains consistent with the rest of the NE back catalogue which is punctuated by a number of equally dramatic changes in focus. A greatest hits album by this group would sound like a compilation, if not for the consistency in quality, innovation and an indefinable but distinctive undercurrent of subversive humour, captured best by the name itself which was chosen to imply

something that happens secretly and perhaps unconsciously, outside the realms of the polite conversation that defines consensus reality.

Over a period of nine months, I exchanged letters with Nigel Ayers, the principal player of the band. The 'dialogue' passed backwards and forwards on bits of paper, edited and re-edited into a whole which flows at least as easily as any NE release. My initial intention was to discover the elusive undercurrent which informs the early overdriven onslaught of 'Smear Campaign' through the carpet-bombing funk of 'Body Count' to the pseudo-hypnotic soundscapes of more recent times. I'm not sure if I actually got an answer, but it was an illuminating and entertaining journey. In what follows, Nigel's occasional claims to have originated every new musical advance of the last two decades, should probably be taken with a pinch of salt. But on the other hand, whether by coincidence or not, a number of his records do seem to hint at what others would popularise about five years down the line. On several occasions Nocturnal Emissions seem to have been in the right place but a few years ahead of the right time. Anyway, I started at the beginning.

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

WA What initially inspired you to start making music?

NIGEL Most probably pragmatism. Music is easy to replicate and its packaging allows opportunity to circulate text and images. I found it an accessible and effective form of publishing.

WA So, what were you doing before?

NIGEL I did a BA degree in sculpture when I was 18 to 21. Which meant that after I left, they put me on the 'executive register' - on

the dole - and said I was effectively unemployable. I then did a series of crap jobs, labouring and factory work. I always wanted to put out records - and books too - just affordable things that people can handle and play around with. I suppose this is why I've never wholeheartedly pursued gallery art that just ends up on one person's wall for no-one else to see. So anyway, together with Caroline K who was my partner at the time, we saved up and put out our own tapes and records. Then later the strange thing happened that I made some no-budget videos for Nocturnal Emissions and places like the Tate Gallery and the ICA started screening them, so I ended up doing what was called 'art,' while trying to do something different!

WA I presume this would be the Bleeding Images video? I remember someone at art college going on about it at the time. I never saw it but I can't really imagine a band in an open top cadillac miming to 'Model Control Organism', so I assume you took a similar approach to your visuals, as to the music?

NIGEL We were called the pioneers of 'scratch video', or 'video scratching' - whatever. We used Super 8mm for years - I made experimental films when I was 13 or 14 that are every bit as good as Channel 4 - which is not a great boast. So the videos were pretty painstakingly assembled on Super 8 - partly documentation of live performances and re-enactments of classic exploitation film scenarios, I was well into plagiarising broadcast TV, taking the piss out of adverts and then putting the whole lot through wonky colour TVs and filming it again. The videos were all crash edited on domestic VHS I borrowed off SPK. Grungey early 80s VHS. So what you get is the 'authenticity' of *The Blair Witch Project* with the look and feel of a lot of TV title sequences you get these days.

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

I played those vids back recently. They could have been made yesterday, but of course this was all done in the early 80s when that kind of presentation was seen as shocking, interesting and new. People were really drawn into those pieces. I remember audiences suddenly going quiet, and this was in 'art installations' where people normally just chat and socialise and drink wine and that. I stopped working on video when the video recording censorship bill came in - seeing as how the vids included shots of sex, animals being tortured, and all that recycled footage. I wasn't interested in pushing deliberate crudeness for year after year and then getting locked up for it. Or perhaps just because it was so successful, I lost interest in it. Well, the basic ideas are all there in Burroughs' *Electronic Revolution*, which is probably on the national curriculum these days.

WA You mentioned that you've always wanted to put out books too.

NIGEL I'm a bibliophile, they love me at the library, those sexy hardbacked temptresses. When I get older I'll finish the various novels I'm writing and start collecting rejection letters. My favourite authors are Flann O'Brien, Stewart Home, John Michell, and P G Wodehouse - or do I mean Raymond Roussel?

WA Sorry to go on about ancient history, but who or what were Pump? Was NE a direct continuation?

NIGEL That was me and my brother Danny and Caroline K and some others, so NE were pretty much a direct continuation of them. The difference is NE were always a lot tighter.

WA You seem to have made at least two quite dramatic changes of direction over the years, notably with *Viral Shedding* and then *The World Is My Womb*.

NIGEL I was sent to a right cow of a piano teacher when I was a kid - and this put me right off conventional ways of making music, but I loved to mess with sound. I was exploring elaborate tape loop and FX processes to make bad-trip psychedelia that some people called 'Industrial' music and 'noise' ... then I realised I could use the exact same processes to make something approximating pop music, and wouldn't it be funny to do so - wrapping those paranoid themes up with compulsive beats and proper tunes. I first tried it on *Drowning in a Sea of Bliss*. Both sides of that record use the same processes, but different elements - one side noisy, the other side groovy ... this was done on 4-track reel to reel tape loops. Then I got the 8-track to do *Viral Shedding*. Basically I liked what was happening in dance music at that time - what they call 'old skool' now - Whodini, Grandmaster Flash and the dafness of Malcolm McLaren's *Duck Rock*. I wanted to dip into that kind of unifying celebratory sound, but give it the edge of the industrial noise. The records I did then were very influential. Scruffy little squatters Nocturnal Emissions started appearing on compilations with New Order and a load of other famous early techno people. We even got some airplay and big crowds coming to gigs, we headlined at one of the first WOMADs. Up to this point I was collaborating very closely with Caroline K - but she really didn't like performing at all and would pull out of gigs at

the last moment and quite frankly, was bonkers. I got some more people in, but I was pretty crap at the logistics of running a band and I paid the ungrateful bastards too much and ended up skint myself. By this time I was also running my own record label and my life was getting very business-oriented and I wasn't really prepared for the kinds of pressure I was under. I'm not very good at being a capitalist. The decisions I made were more to do with what interested me creatively, so I took the more arcane route into *The World Is My Womb*, which was really looking at what you'd now call 'pre-Millennial tension' from the perspective of the first Millennium. So that was really an exploration of medieval music and religion, but done on a Greengate sampler - because this was the 80s after all. As well as this 'serious art', I was also trying to get an acid house project off the ground (check the 'Da Dum' single that came out with Spiritflesh) - this was 86 or 87, and I had my mutant hip-hop *Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox* project going. I remember my label manager at Red Rhino distribution saying acid house would never catch on in the North of England. Ho ho ho. Anyway, later that year Red Rhino went bust and I ended up back on the dole again. Caroline had hung onto most of the NE studio stuff, which she sold off as she retired from music making. So I was left with minimal equipment, and for quite a few years I made minimalist music. Then of course that whole 'ambient' scene grew from the kind of music I was doing. In fact, every major musical movement in the past 20 years was all my fault. I am to blame for it all. If there is an underlying theme through all my work it is to do with communicating with and exploring 'other' and more 'real' worlds, rather than the confection that is 'consensus reality'. If I have a role therefore, it is as a pioneer and explorer, rather than a cash-inner. To explore, you have to move around, not simply follow the first path you happen upon and then stay on it because it is familiar, or to do things because they win you riches, favour and followers, I leave it to others to convert the diamonds I share back to base material.

WA Was there any specific attempt to distance yourself from previous work?

NIGEL More of an attempt to distance myself from the scene my previous work attracted. Some of my work with carefully structured environmental sound ('noise') and satirical visual pieces using 'shock' imagery to parody consumer society - found favour with people in the so-called 'industrial' underground. They had - and continue to have - a tendency to fetishise such imagery in their own miniature consumer society - and largely missed the point of what I was doing. I think I made it clear at the time what I was on about. To this end I put out various press releases which were in *Tract 002*.

WA I take it then you'd grown weary of being asked about the usual 'apocalypse culture' clichés. The first *Earthly Delights* press release suggested to me a desire to focus on less depressing subjects, and to discourage people from sending you tapes with death camps on the cover.

NIGEL Yup. I'd rather people used their brains a bit, instead of buying off-the-peg-identities from the *Amok* catalogue. It all smacks of fascism.

WA Which paints a fairly clear picture of who you don't listen to. I find it difficult to detect any specific musical influences on your records, and only very general ones on the more dance friendly offerings. So what do you listen to, or have you listened to in the past? There must surely be some artist that influenced your direction when everyone else and their milkman was trying to become the new Sex Pistols?

NIGEL The Sex Pistols eh? They could rock. I liked them despite their impoliteness and lack of courtesy. I missed their Bill Grundy TV thing when they did it. In '76, but I remember this Lou Reed lookalike general studies lecturer going on about punk rock, and me wondering what the fuck it was. Then I heard the Pistols and thought 'Oh, it's what I listen to anyway'. I'd been tormenting people with the MC5 since way back.

WA Influences. You were saying. . .

NIGEL If you look at the whole of that so-called 'Industrial' scene from Cabaret Voltaire to Marilyn Manson, the band with the most far reaching influence wouldn't be Throbbing Gristle, but... Hawkwind! This is something that they rarely mention in the press, as Hawkwind have this reputation as a British 'hippie band' who do 'science fiction' and theatrics, and therefore must be naff. Whereas if they were a German hippie band... Zoviet France have told me they were very keen on Hawkwind. SPK were well into Hawkwind back in Australia. And what are Graeme Revell (SPK) and Brian Williams (SPK, Lustmord) doing nowadays? Making soundtracks for science fiction films - I rest my case! I think it's about time Hawkwind were reassessed. I have long been tired of those outfits who cite influences no-one has heard of, or can stand listening to. Back in the early 70s, Hawkwind were the first band I was aware of to popularise the idea of sonic attack - infra and ultra sound as a weapon. Listen to 'Sonic Attack' on *Space Ritual*. That of course has long since been taken up by that whole noise scene, but. Hawkwind were rarely acknowledged. If you look at the 'information war' thing, you'll notice that Hawkwind had the post-modern writers, Michael Moorcock and Bob Calvert working with them. Though Moorcock is best known for his very popular science fiction and fantasy genre work, it's more accurate to call him a postmodernist or at least a modernist. Moorcock pointed many in the direction of William Burroughs and J.G. Ballard and - stone me, he even wrote for *Re/Search*. When Hawkwind's *In Search of Space* came out in the early 70s, it came with a booklet of very similar material to what the London Psychogeographical Society, The Association of Autonomous Astronauts, Ian Sinclair, and Tom Vague have been doing more recently. Whenever I used to see Psychic TV, I thought 'Hawkwind'. Whenever I saw Throbbing Gristle I thought 'Hawkwind without the lights...and without the tunes'. That combat clothing thing - Hawkwind! Which brings me to the point that I would definitely question the history of punk rock and weirdy music that overlaps it - that media hacks have tended to spout. I remember that, apart from media darlings the Sex Pistols, the DIY punk scene in early 70s Britain seemed to be much inspired by the efforts of Hawkwind, the Edgar Broughton Band, the Pink Fairies and even Gong - and the context of the free

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festivals, Free festival - a self-organising proletarian cultural gathering often involving a bit of a knees up and maybe a punch up with the coppers. See also 'rave'. Brian Eno, for example used to hang out with the Pink Fairies. The whole set-up and costuming of Roxy Music was a direct crib off Hawkwind. AMM - my arse! Eno's a popularist, otherwise why's he working with U2? In 1972 Hawkwind followed up 'Silver Machine' - a million selling hit about a time travel machine built by the pataphysicist Alfred Jarry - with the single 'Urban Guerrilla'. It was pulled by the record company because of fears about an IRA bombing campaign in London at the time. They later re-recorded it with Johnny Rotten. Joe Strummer's 101ers and The Stranglers used to play on the same bill as Hawkwind in the free festival days, pre 1976. In interviews at the time, Strummer cited Hawkwind as an influence on The Clash's first album. Pete Shelley of The Buzzcocks admitted he spent a lot of his youth listening to *Space Ritual* and derived a lot of his musical direction from it. And of course Lemmy of Motorhead used to play bass in Hawkwind. I went to see Sun Ra and his Arkestra once, and I got bored after 20 minutes of that jazz shite and went home. I've seen Hawkwind loads of times and they rock!

WA As I've probably banged on about in reviews, a lot of your stuff has for me a disembodied quality, almost as though it's channelled through to rather than created by you. Does this notion have any relevance to your actual working methods?

NIGEL It has a great deal. My working method have a bit of the alchemist and a bit of the shaman about them. It's communicating with the spirit world and abandoning the concept of 'individual personality'.

WA Which could make for appalling soporific audio toilet water of the kind that most artists labelled 'ambient' seem to churn out, but happily you are generally able to avoid the common pitfalls of producing subtle and atmospheric music, for want of a better word. Is this a conscious thing, or just plain luck? Would you even consider your record in terms of being 'ambient'?

NIGEL I should point out that even though I channel messages from the spirit world, I don't necessarily believe the bullshit the spirits tell me. It's all very tightly edited and I tend to use my intellectual faculties a lot more than the 'amby-pamby' crowd do. 'Ambient' means background music. My music shifts from background to foreground, so I wouldn't consider it ambient. I consider what I do to be a subversive music, because it messes with people's heads in unexpected ways.

WA Which brings me to a subject I expect you're heartily sick of. I understand you've dabbled in the use of subliminals on record.

NIGEL What I've been reading lately on brain/mind research makes the concept of subliminals questionable indeed. Do you

recordable on record, at both a liminal and subliminal level, I'm not fussed.

WA How do they work?

NIGEL The theory is that the mind processes, absorbs and remembers everything that the eyes and ears are exposed to, no matter how heavily disguised the message may be. If you read Wilson Bryan Key's books - *Subliminal Seduction* for example - he suggests that the words 'sex' and 'death' are airbrushed very very faintly into the ice cubes in Martini adverts, and that these very subtle, so subtle as to be undetectable messages, influence you to go and buy Martini, because everyone has a death wish. The books are fascinating, and quite potty. It's on the level of the backwards messages Christian groups found on Judas

Priest, and surprisingly, Venom records. Gullible fool record collectors will go on about how there's subliminals on it, how there's ultrasound. It's all a load of bollocks to anyone who understands the science, because despite what Freud said, the brain doesn't process and remember every little detail of everything. Wilson Bryan Key is just doing the equivalent of staring at a fire and seeing elephants. That's what my grandma, a woman not noted for her grasp on reality, used to do.

WA So they don't actually work?

NIGEL What works more is the context. But when you work in music you're dealing with loads of different audience expectations. Mood is affected by all sorts of triggers. So, the theory of subliminals is similar to the theory of homeopathy, the smaller a dose of something, the more powerful it's supposed to become. Now I know plenty of people who swear

by homeopathy, but I don't think that works either, and they ain't too pleased when I tell them! Music is a complex business though and most people don't sit down and analyse it, so perhaps to them it has a subliminal effect.

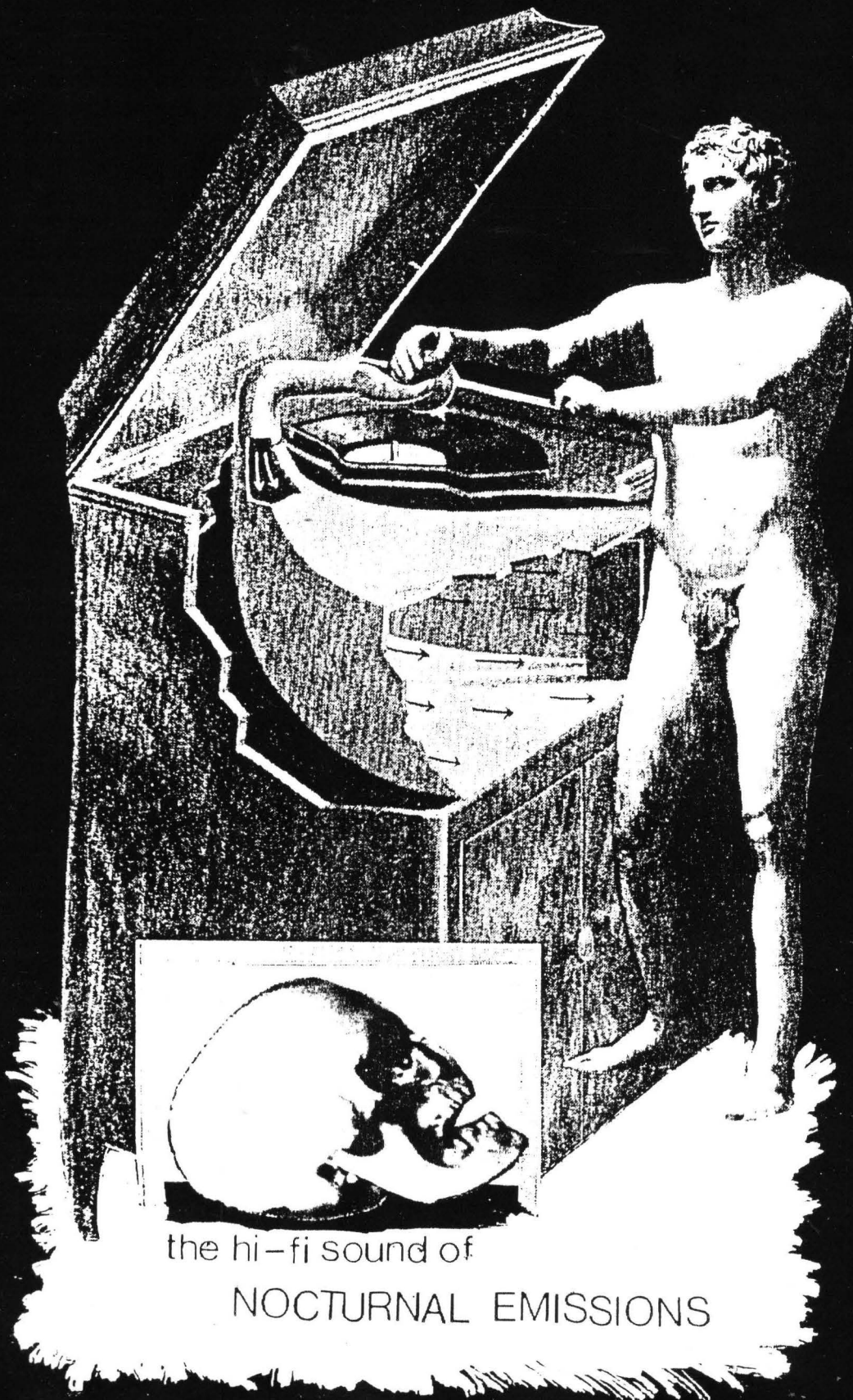
WA Going back to ultrasound, a subject I'm contractually obliged to mention in anything that appears in The Sound Projector, is it true that you once used big naughty speakers in a



NETWORK NEWS

NUMBER TWELVE: LAND OF THE GIANTS ISSUE

think *The Exorcist* is scary? Is that because of the use of the sound of pigs being slaughtered, bees swarming in the background, or the single frame of a white death mask? Or is it the background context - hysterical religious groups suckered into protesting against it in the '70s? I went to see it recently and found it boring, except that there was almost a fight between two or three members of the audience and the manager. That's Penzance for you. I've used about every sound



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live setting of the kind that are reputed to cause tummy trouble?

NIGEL More than once, quite a lot, and they also make you go deaf. Always use hearing protection, then you get all the fun of pooing your pants without the damage to your hearing.

WA So what is Practical Time Travel, the latest CD, all about? Ed Pinsent reckons he's seen a book with that title which is something to do with achieving time travel through staring at the stars for a while. It sounds a little rum to me.

NIGEL I've been experiencing a lot of deja vu and wanted to look into what time was all about. All music is to do with control over time in some way, it's a time based art. I wanted to explore where I could take it and it could take me. Like I say, I make music of the future. This is strictly to do with my experience of time. Time isn't an absolute. It's a human-made construct. I don't know what Ed's been reading, but if you look at the stars, you're looking back in time, cause they're so far away and light takes so long to travel that what you're seeing happened quite some time ago. The next issue of *Network News* will be a time travel issue, where the practicalities will be sorted.

WA How did Oedipus Brain Foil come about?

NIGEL I got on the phone to Robin Storey who I knew from his Soviet France days (spelling it with an 'S' is better I think, don't you?) - I'd done a live improvisation with him once and suggested we could do a CD by swapping DATs backwards and forwards. So we did that. And then it turned out that Randy Greif was doing a similar sort of thing with Robin. They'd met in California. Then Charles Powne of Soleilmoon suggested we made it a threesome and I did one with Randy, whom I've never met. Then it turns out that Randy works as a 'real estate agent' and he's selling Graeme Revell's luxury Hollywood mansion with 46 bathrooms and a two-headed-baby-shaped swimming pool, which tickled me because in the old days Graeme - then known as 'Operator' of Surgikal Penis Klinik - used to kip on my settee in a squat in South London. Then Robin decided he was Napoleon and came up with the CD title *Perfidious Albion*. Then Randy got some scabble letters and rearranged the letters to come up with *Oedipus Brain Foil* and *Build A Poison Fire*. Then Soleilmoon rearranged the letters of Randy's name for the artwork by 'mistake' and it all had to be printed again. It was Soleilmoon's top-selling CD.

WA I take it this was a slightly different approach to how you've worked with Caroline K and Charlotte Bill in the past?

NIGEL I worked with them differently. When I worked with Caroline we'd swap over tasks a lot - in who did what compositionally. I tended to do the final edits. Charlotte's contribution to Nocturnal Emissions music was she did two or three short 'raw material' improvisations on the flute and oboe which I sampled, mutated and recycled in umpteen hundred different ways, over several albums. Apart from that, she concentrated exclusively on her film work, which she seems to be doing quite well with.

WA What would you define as consensus reality?

NIGEL The fuzzy belief system promoted and exploited by most media organisations and politicians. Noam Chomsky has an angle on it in his book *Manufacturing Consent*. It's a call for sceptical enquiry really. I also enjoy things that are on the fringe of believability and I play with notions of 'truth' and 'fiction' in *Network News*. Remind readers that I'm not Christian Militia, a Third Positionist, an anarchist or a UFO nut. I'm just plain Nigel out of the Emissions.

WA When you played live at the Garage. I was quite surprised that you were doing the vocal stuff, as I was expecting a fairly droney instrumental set.

NIGEL Oh that. Oh yes, it was a bit like when Dylan went electric and they all shouted 'Judas' at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester in that book by C.P. Lee, formerly of Alberta Y Los Trios Paranoias.

WA I haven't heard anything by you since ooh... The World Is My Womb, that has had any lyrical contribution... which is a bit of a shame in some ways. Obviously you're never going to be competing with Plácido Domingo or Barry White in vocal terms, but you still manage to 'vocalise' with utmost conviction if not technical prowess, notably on the improvised addition of '... and don't call me a wanker, you wanker' to the live version of 'No Sacrifice.' I just wondered if the set at the Garage might be an indication of an impending return to the microphone?

NIGEL That improvisation was me dealing with a heckler. I've been back on the mic. for nearly 2 years now, for live shows, just none of it has surfaced in recordings yet. I'm doing more of it. What you saw at The Garage was a remix of the old songs, mostly. But I've umpteen DATs full of new stuff to work on. I've just laid down some vocals on an avant-garde country and western album that I'm working on with Robin Storey. Perhaps the first of a new genre.

WA Who and where do you think your audience is? I gather from what you've said that the UK in general hasn't been especially supportive.

NIGEL I'm signed to Soleilmoon, a small but very good American record label. I used to have reasonable circulation in the UK many years ago, but I think the network of independent shops isn't what it used to be. But then, it's only a little island that we're living on, and the kids all want Playstations these days. When I went to New York, people knew who I was, which was nice. They all love me in Germany too. As you can imagine, whenever I'm there it's a non-stop shagathon.

Thanks to Nigel Ayers for his correspondence, patience and persistence in following extended trains of thought in directions which provided many entertaining and illuminating answers to questions I hadn't actually asked.

The bulk of the Nocturnal Emissions back catalogue is available for the monetary equivalent of your first born child from collector's record shops. Recent albums at more reasonable prices are available from Earthly Delights, who also sporadically produce *Network News* magazine which

collects further esoteric and eccentric thoughts of Mr Ayers.

Send an SAE or IRC to: Earthly Delights, PO BOX 2. Lostwithiel, Cornwall, PL23 0YY, UK.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Nocturnal Emissions Discography

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Vinyl

Tissue of Lies LP (Sterile 1981)
Fruiting Body LP (Sterile 1981)
Drowning in a Sea of Bliss LP (Sterile 1983)
Viral Shedding LP (Illuminated 1983)
Befehlsnotstand LP (Earthly Delights 1983)
Chaos (live) LP (CFC 1984)
Shake Those Chains Rattle Those Cages LP (Sterile 1984)
No Sacrifice 12" (Sterile 1984)
Songs Of Love And Revolution LP (Sterile 1985)
The World is My Womb LP (Earthly Delights 1987)
Spiritflesh LP (Earthly Delights 1988)
Stoneface LP (Parade Amoureuse 1989)
Beyond Logic Beyond Belief LP (Earthly Delights 1990)
Energy Exchange LP (Earthly Delights 1991)
Da Dum 7" (Parade Amoureuse 1989)
Mouth of Babes LP (Earthly Delights 1992)
The Quickening LP (Earthly Delights 1993)
Imaginary Time LP (Soleilmoon)
ABC (alien black cat) 7" (1998)

Compact Discs

Stoneface / Spiritflesh (Dark Vinyl 1989)
Invocation of the Beast Gods (Staalplaat 1990)
Tissue of Lies - Revised (Dark Vinyl 1990)
Cathedral (Musica Maxima Magnetica 1991)
Mouth of Babes (Soleilmoon 1991)
Viral Shedding (Dark Vinyl 1992)
Songs of Love and Revolution (Dark Vinyl 1992)
Befehlsnotstand (Dark Vinyl 1992)
Blasphemous Rumours (Staalplaat 1992)
Drowning in a Sea of Bliss (Touch 1992)
Magnetised Light (Musica Maxima Magnetica 1993)
Glossalalia (Soleilmoon 1994)
Binary Tribe (Staalplaat 1994)
Duty Experiment (Soleilmoon 1995)
Friction and Dirt (Staalplaat 1996)
Autonomia (Soleilmoon 1996)
Tharmunnrape an 'goo (Soleilmoon 1997)
Sunspot Activity (Soleilmoon 1997)
Practical Time Travel (Earthly Delights 1998)
Omphalos! (Soleilmoon 1998)
The World is my Womb (Soleilmoon 1999)
Electropunk Karaoke (Earthly Delights 2000)

Collaborations

The Beauty of Pollution (with C.C.C.C.) (1997)
Morocco (with Expose Your Eyes) (1998)
Spanner Thru Ma Beatbox LP (Earthly Delights 1987?) (Nigel Ayers)
Oedipus Brain Foil 3 x CD (Soleilmoon 1999) (Nigel Ayers, Randy Greif, Robin Storey)
Mesmeric Enabling Device (Soleilmoon 1999) (Nigel Ayers, John Everall, Mick Harris)
Transgenic 'Horsey/Bellboy' (7" single) (Electric Transfusion 1999) (Nigel Ayers)
Transgenic (Soleilmoon 2000) (Nigel Ayers)
The Invisible Universe (Soleilmoon 2000) (Nigel Ayers and Robin Storey)

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✿ NOSTRUMS ✿ STRATAGEMS ✿ GIDGETS ✿ AND ✿ GADGETS ✿



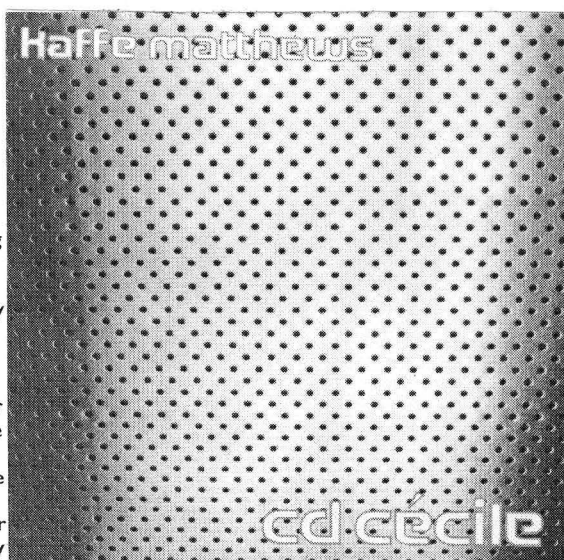
Kaffe Matthews

CD Cécile

ANNETTE WORKS AWCD0003

CD

This, following on from her previous CDs *Ann* and *Bea*, is naturally enough the third in a series of recordings by the very able Matthews - who's highly valued as a free violinist in improvising circles. However the *Ann* and *Bea* CDs (so I have read) actually feature progressively less violin playing, and by the time we check in here at stage *Cécile* there's very little of it at all! Instead, Matthews plays the self-appointed role of a 'live convertor on the case', performing extensive live reprocessing of sounds, no doubt using the LiSa (Live Sampling) software which she has made all her very own. Interesting that Phil Durrant is another UK improv violinist who is also heavily into live reprocessing (of himself and of others playing), and equally interesting that Kaffe Matthews has her own voice entirely distinct from his. It's the artist behind the paintbrush that counts, not the paintbrush -



even when that paintbrush is a sumptuous electronic tool like this one...

In three long suites (recorded in London, Oslo and Chicago) Matthews delivers an unfailingly excellent and intense barrage of

simply beautiful noisy music. It can be a devastating rush of closely-edited noises to form a continuous tornado wind of sound, or a softly crackling passage of static. Some of it is as fast as a jet plane, some is slow and weird, like some bespectacled intellectual worrying away at an algebra problem. Perhaps we should be stressing the live / real-time aspect of the work, rather than stressing the electronic-ness of it, because it's in her quick-thinking and intuitive movements that Matthews truly shines as a gifted and hard-working creator. If you ask me, any buffoon can tinker with their material in a studio until it achieves that overcooked perfection they so desire, but it takes real guts to take on the forces of unprocessed noise and wrestle with 'em live, in the amphitheatre surrounded by sweaty grunts (indeed it seems that often the noise of the audience themselves also get sampled into the

warp and woof of the music), and this plucky musician manages to pin the opponent to the mat more than once. And it's not simply testosterone-driven feedback-feasting, much as I love that scene too! Matthews is turning in real craft, every jolting explosion and manic

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loop qualifies as a fully embroidered, triple-fired, hand-painted work of art.

In *Resonance* magazine (Vol 6 No 2) Matthews enthused about her lovely toy, the LiSa device and all the peripherals associated with it. The software was designed in an Amsterdam studio by Frank Balde and the great Michel Waisvisz, he whose 'crackle board' turns up on a Derek Bailey LP and who played a strange monophonic synth with Steve Lacy (and others) in 1974 (see the CD Emanem 4024). The possibilities this technology opens up inspire Kaffe Matthews: 'As a process for making new music as we end the 20th century, this seems an optimistic path to be taking. A whole music, that plays in sound but makes pictures, that crosses borders, that is rich and new, is active and involving not mere spectacle; that is made through the place and the people, there, then. Now this seems to be something worth doing'. And is it worth hearing, too? In spades!!!

ED PINSENT

From *Annette Works*, PO Box 14077, London N16 5WF
www.annetetworks.demon.co.uk

Limpe Fuchs Nur Mar Mus GERMANY, STREAMLINE 1016 CD (1999)

The second CD by Limpe Fuchs to be issued by Streamline, and a very good one it is too. Here she plays a mixture of 'real' instruments along with the more unconventional range of instruments - some of which, like the brilliant ballast string instruments, were developed by Paul Fuchs, her husband. Her percussion battery is no less singular; it includes tuned stones (The Serpentin Stones), sheets of bronze, pieces of oak fashioned into wood blocks, and heavy bronze bars fixed on a long piano wire and suspended from a broad bronze drum. Metal, wood and stone - how elemental can you get? On some tracks she's joined by George Karger on the bass, and Thomas Korpiun on percussion, and together with her bizarre vocal stylings and dripping water solos they create a species of dark, slow jazz music which hasn't been dared since Eric Dolphy recorded the unforgettable 'Warp and Woof' in the early 1960s.

Limpe has sure come quite a way since she took part in the Anima-Sound sessions (see elsewhere this issue), and this CD isn't by any means as wild as that early record, but she has succeeded in finding and developing a totally unique voice and (on the evidence of this particular issue) never failed to deliver disquieting, solemn and challenging music, entirely on her own terms.

ED PINSENT



Jesse Paul Miller

[Secret Records]

USA, FIRE BREATHING TURTLE NO NUMBER 7" VINYL SINGLE (1997)

What an utterly fascinating single. I played this late at night and without warning, suddenly noticed I'd stopped breathing for three minutes. What a remote and haunting sound. Imagine the world utterly quiet and still, because it's thousands of years after the end of the world. Imagine that all that's left of our so-called civilisation is fragments of trash, scraps of newspapers, amounting to a few shattered pieces of incoherent gibberish. A bleak view that, so let's try a more positive one. Imagine a time machine fetching back totally distorted and virtually unreadable

could name who make such a fetish out of rotating vinyl on a gramophone, in both the fields of avant-garde and mainstream entertainment music) the work of Mr Miller transcends the mechanics by which it's produced, immediately, totally and without question. It's a transparent process, plugging you instantly into the idea through sound. It's an innovation, not just a novelty. The listener is not merely interested, but *astounded*.

What are the foreign bodies pressed within these moulds? Regina Hackett wrote of 'mismatched buttons, wavy streams of human hair, cancelled tickets, strips of wallpaper, maps and butter wrappers. These thick, slightly warped circles are time capsules of memory, loss and desire.' She was writing about one of Miller's art installations at the

Seattle Art Museum, connecting this work to John Cage and to a father of American absurdity, Robert Rauschenberg. The checklist of debris from the streets could have been made into a powerful collage by Kurt Schwitters, but already modern art is beyond that - passed into an unfeeling age where the preservation of transient garbage happens by accident, and means nothing. The epoxy resin of these Secret Records has become amber, preserving insects from another age. Listener-scientists, learn from this!

ED PINSENT

PO Box 45243, Seattle, Washington 98145, USA

Adam Bohman Music and Words PARADIGM PD09 CD (1999)

Enter the world of Adam Bohman...through a doorway of sound. Another beguiling and baffling record from Paradigm, another in Clive Graham's ongoing project to present utterly new and unusual listening experiences to the unsuspecting public.

The music side is represented by a handful of Bohman's live solo performances, where he

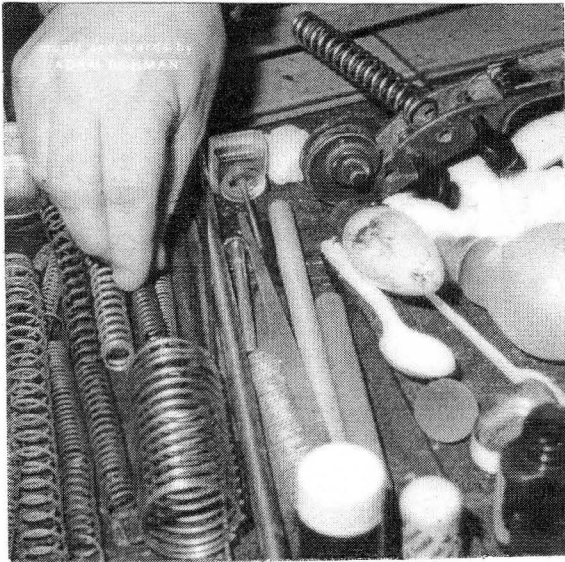
makes an eerie range of scraping, groaning and clattery tinkly noises with his devices. Very little in the way of traditional musical instruments I suspect, judging by the array of interesting junk pictured on the cover here. The ghost of Michael Prime appears on some tapes of him playing the Hammond organ on one very successful track. Both Prime and Bohman are members of the reliably excellent improv-noise-tape combo, Morphogenesis.

The words component is the more eccentric aspect to this disc. I guess it amounts to a bunch of



images from the past, or from the future - lacking the skills to decode them, we are left with atomised information, that we must reconstruct as best we can.

Sonic archaeology. This is what you'll hear on this extremely unsettling little record. Yet there's no secret to the 'secret records' - the construction and execution of this sculpture / installation crossover work is made plain on the sleeve notes: 'Secret records are cast from found vinyl records in epoxy resin. Found objects are layered in the translucent epoxy as it sets. The resulting epoxy record has inverted grooves. Each secret record is unique in appearance and source mould. They are an unknown collaboration.' It's more than just a post-modern deconstruction of the record player. The key word here just might be 'translucent', because (unlike others I



semi-documentary recordings which are the accumulated detritus from Bohman's hours spent compulsively taping his mental jottings on a hand-held cassette recorder. Through his daily life, he pauses to record observations on his surroundings or events. We had a sample of this (the 'Belgium Barrage') on Clive Graham's first *Variations* compilation. What emerges? Quick shopping list:

- Family life - the claustrophobia of a family Christmas. His mum tellingly turning off a tape player because it was near to driving her mad.
- Marked interest in food, and the preparation of food. A pre-war recipe for a fruit fool clipped from a newspaper is painstakingly read aloud.
- Peripatetic journeys through the drabest corners of South London, highly reminiscent of my fave films *London* and *Robinson in Space*, both by Patrick Keillor. Except that unlike Keillor, Bohman has no political agenda whatsoever - he's just observing. Also reminiscent of Viv Stanshall's field recordings, except Bohman doesn't stop to talk to people to garner their opinions on Shirts, nor to ask them 'The Question'.
- A tremendous precision of mind and attention to detail - some of it trivial detail, about what people are wearing, the hour of the day, the precise wording of a rather boring shop sign. Cornell Woolrich wrote his mystery novels this way, and it drove me round the bend. In one of them (*Deadline At Dawn*) it became essential to reconstruct, through minute trace evidence, the exact movements of a character who had vacated a room two hours ago. Horrible - it brings out the existentialist in me. As to the triviality, Bohman has the honour of nearly

becoming Viv Stanshall's neighbour in 'My Pink Half Of The Drainpipe' - was it a Tuesday or a Wednesday? This disc is shaping up to be an avant-garde answer record to the Bonzos.

- A charming turn of phrase now and then, a passer-by referred to as a 'gentleman' - how many people talk like this any more?

The compulsive fascination I'm displaying with this record is probably an acquired taste, but you won't have heard anything like it before. The added bonus is the wobbly sound

caused by Bohman's cheap tape recorder running out of battery power, and the disjunctive effects of all the pause-button edits...as you'll know this is how some of Captain Beefheart's accapella songs on *Trout Mask Replica* were put together. As indicated in the sleeve notes, this adds a kind of poor man's musique concrète dimension to the work.

One listen and you'll know more about the inner mind of Mr Bohman than perhaps you had bargained for.

ED PINSENT

From paradigm@gn.apc.org

Richard Lerman A Matter of Scale and other pieces USA, ANOMALOUS RECORDS LERMAN 3 (1997)

A collection of four concert pieces from this big-thinking installation / performance artist from America, who builds all his own instruments and has a very individualistic approach to staging his work. Reading the notes to Lerman's methods, on paper it all looks wonderful - he has an impressive sense of scale and how to deploy performers in extremely unusual ways. Like grumpy old Stockhausen, he makes demands on the venues he plays in and challenges the conventions of ordinary microphone placement; in 1981's 'Entrance Music' we've got mics placed '20 feet up in the tall fly space of the theatre' at the Netherlands Cultural Centre in Utrecht. Lerman builds his own

electronic instruments, and, never satisfied with cruddy venue gear, built his own preamps for the 1986 piece at the Houston Astrodome. On one track he plays microphones with a butane torch! And I love the sense of slight absurdity to the work - the use of an amplified slinky, the Audobon bird calls, the amplified bicycle, the soda straw and plastic cups...he has a sense of humour without being wacky.

The ideas are great - I only wish this actual recorded document were more enjoyable and rewarding as music. The sounds we hear here must be only the residue of a greater event - the Astrodome one for example was largely visual as well as aural, involving 'interplay of large sounds coming from very small hand-held instruments inside a huge reverberant space'. Sadly, it doesn't quite translate to the small scale of the home-listening CD. The sounds become shapeless, limp, and meandering - very slow and aimless - and ultimately irritating. I wonder if the artist has spent too much time on the staging of grand-scale events, and not enough time on composing music. That said I do like the third track, 1994's 'Old Friends with Pitch to MIDI', but mainly because there's more real playing on it - synth and guitar contributions of his old improv / jazz buddies, Tom Hamilton and Bertrand Moon respectively. Weirdly, their work reminds me of Derek Bailey when he played with Michel Waisvisz.

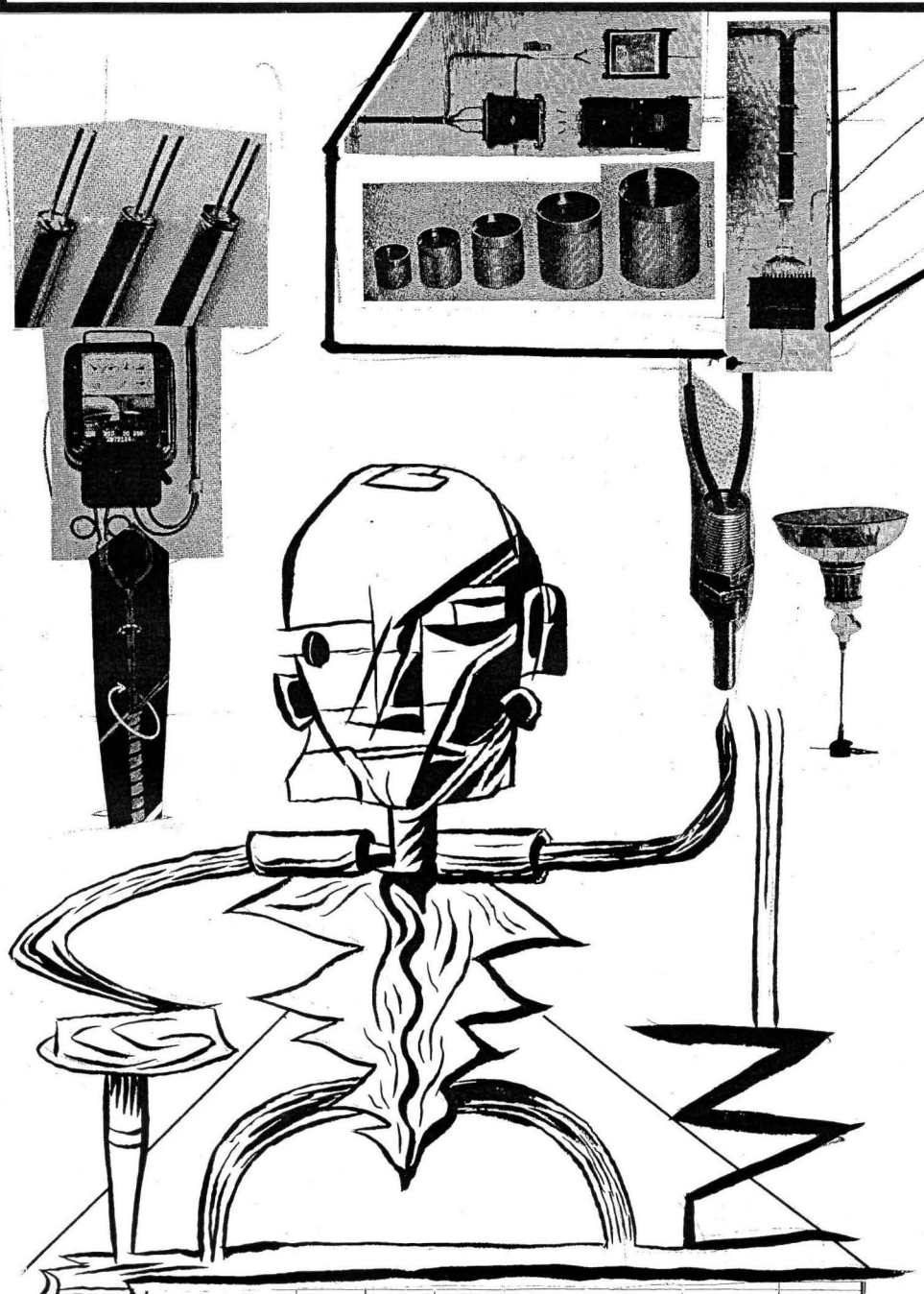
Still, Lerman's clearly an unusual and dedicated artist - and I feel sure that if I saw his work in the correct context, staged in a large venue, then I would be fully rewarded. And if you want to know how to make a 'Plinky' of your own - you need to buy this CD!

ED PINSENT



RUN of the ARROW - A SEQUENCER bursts its ARTERIES FOR
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Shadowbug 4 Tiny Voices of Love and Fear USA, SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS SOL79CD, CD (1999)

Randy Greif. Randy Greif. Randy Greif. How do I know this name? Shadowbug 4 is the banner under which he's working for the purposes of this CD. I'd heard of him from somewhere before *Oedipus Brain Foil*, on which he collaborated with Robin Storey and Nigel Ayers. The press release claims he is 'best known for his six hour-long psycho-atmospheric setting of *Alice In Wonderland*', but that doesn't ring any bells either. I asked my friend Shaun who knew of some great and fine endeavour which had made the man's name, but the titles and nature of whatever it was remained just a scant distance from the tip of his tongue. We spent an entire evening going over our memories with a fine toothed comb, to little avail. It probably doesn't matter but it's the same as when one is seized by a sudden irrational need to recall the name of the ginger one in *Brookside* whose brother was a squaddie, for example.

Randy Greif's music on this CD is similarly difficult to pin down with a written account. It feels dark and heavily orchestrated. There's a lot going on. It's largely electronic, or at least derived from heavily treated sources, while remaining resolutely organic in terms of the progression and development of the instrumental tracks which seem to unfold and grow

218 to 297	"F"	32P25	$\frac{1}{8}"$	0.46"	"F"	$\frac{3}{8}"$	4P11A	60
302 to 422	"G"	32P26	$\frac{3}{8}"$	0.588"	"G"	$\frac{1}{2}"$	4P12A	48
437 to 531	"H"	32P27	$\frac{1}{2}"$	0.713"	"H"	$\frac{5}{8}"$	4P13A	20
547 to 641	"J"	32P28	1"	0.835"	"J"	1"	4P14A	8

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like flowers, rather than programmes. I'm reminded a little of the composition, although not the end result, of *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* with that album's broad savannahs supplanted by forest interiors so dense that you may as well be underground, the electronic undergrowth teeming with life. There seems to be a tribal undercurrent running through some of this, which is emphasised on 'You Can Come Down' where swooping electronica and treated half-voices dance around an extended bout of bongo bashing. It's a track worthy of Tribu, as covered elsewhere in this issue. Hypnotically primal and, I don't doubt, quite capable of conjuring up the odd passing esoteric God under the appropriate circumstances. But then this is equally true of *Tiny Voices of Love and Fear* as a whole, and it bears witness to Randy Greif's ability that all this atmosphere, as dense as molasses, comes from music completely unassisted by silly sleeve notes bogged down with magical symbols or references to the usual occult suspects. If any of those theory-laden black clothes-sporting groups had ever come up with something as powerful and evocative as this, then the industrial sections of those collectors' record shops might actually be worth taking a pog at every once in a while.

WAR ARROW

Tlön Uqbar La Bola Perdida

NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT
STCD139 CD (1999)

A fruitful collaboration between two French bands, Internal Fusion and Désaccord Majeur, this is Ambient music with an edge. The CD's five long pieces convey an impressive range of rhythms and atmospheres, reminiscent of Zoviet France in their layered accretion of organic detail. All of the tracks, except the closing 'Mylodon', are similarly structured. Ominous ambient sounds - distorted drones, watery splashes, radio interference - frame hypnotic looped rhythms and vivid instrumental strokes. Traces of ethnic-sounding percussion and harsher metallic collisions mingle with diverse human voices (European speech, middle Eastern chant) to form a complex, involving soundscape. Eventually the intricate rhythms come to predominate, forming sharp contours inside the listener's head. More ambient than the other pieces, but no less absorbing, 'Mylodon' ends the album on a reflective note. Its restrained beats, disembodied voices and gently vibrant drone are soothing and delightful.

RICHARD REES JONES



Stylus The Last Seaweed Collecting Hut at Freshwater West

OCHRE RECORDS OCH012LCD CD
(1999)

A quite fine and distinguished effort from Dafydd Morgan aka Stylus here. Unusual theme, and unusual results. The title refers to a highly singular feature of 19th century rural life, now vanished - may sound far-fetched but it seems seaside-dwelling folk used to gather seaweed, to dry it out in seaweed collecting huts and sell it on, to bake something called laver bread. Poverty makes us do strange



things. A surviving example of a seaweed collecting hut is now a museum piece (at Pembrokeshire Coast National Park), the photograph on the cover a vision from another age. The music delivers the promised unusual results too - frequently successful in evoking that very definite sense of location it strives for. This effect isn't achieved just through applying layers of spray-on atmosphere which comes ready-made through most electronic works these days - instead, it's a carefully assembled stream of loops, drones and synthesised wind effects, all suggesting a mysterious and splendid journey back in time.

ED PINSENT

90° South The Barrier Silence

OCHRE RECORDS OCH014LCD CD
(1999)

The folks at Ochre Records continue their mission to bring quality electronica to the people with this impressive CD by Kevin Fox, aka 90° South. Fox namechecks labelmates EAR on the insert, and he shares Sonic Boom's fondness for vintage equipment; instruments used include valve amplifiers, Stylophones and 'various mechanical and electronic toys'. Thankfully, however, such gimmickry is relegated to a minor role. Instead it's the Fender electric piano that predominates, its warm emotional timbre lending a quiet strength to these nine mostly instrumental pieces.

As the artwork makes clear, this is programme music. The sleeve note is an extract from a poem by Edward Wilson, the chief scientific officer on the 1911-12 Antarctic expedition, and there is a strong sense of exploration and discovery in the music. The unexplored landscape is evocatively described through the sparing use of bass and percussion. Fluid guitar and piano patterns depict the human presence, their attenuation hinting at the insignificance of the explorers within the vastness of the landscape.

The mood is mostly quiet and sober, evoking stillness and contemplation rather than excitement or danger. Only on 'Streamliner' does Fox break into a sweat, pumping out a bustling groove reminiscent of Stereolab.

Occasionally, as on 'ITOM', Fox's debt to Sonic Boom (in his Spectrum incarnation) becomes rather too obvious, as a bubbling synth threatens to overwhelm the guitar and piano. But this is a rare lapse of judgement. Otherwise, the tone of the album is summed up in the marvellous 'Winter Road Movie', with acoustic and electric elements darting among each other in vivid and highly expressive interplay.

RICHARD REES JONES

Vidna Obmana and Serge Devadder The Shape of Solitude

AUSTRIA, MULTIMOOD RECORDS
MRC027 CD (1999)

Vidna Obmana is a Belgian sound sculptor whose recent *Motives for Recycling*, a remix of work by Asmus Tietchens, was reviewed in the last *Sound Projector*. On this occasion he teams up with guitarist Serge Devadder for an hour's worth of fairly run-of-the-mill Ambient fare.

The CD opens with some virtuoso guitar playing from Devadder. His technique may be faultless, but the effect is soporific. Interwoven with these tasteful pluckings are Obmana's more testing manipulations, which gradually come to dominate the album.

'Perceptual Edge' sees Devadder's playing move up a notch, his intricate picking complemented nicely by Obmana's sustained washes of sound. The lengthy 'A Stinging Memory Of Shared Skin' is the album's high point; the heavily treated guitar floats malevolently around the listener, producing an eerie, alien sound world. This ominous mood continues in the album's effective closing piece, 'Leaving This Place Again'.

Over the course of an hour, however, interest palls. The above highlights aside, it all sounds so terribly inert, its aimlessness evidence of a lack of imagination and spirit rather than any kind of contemplative detachment.

RICHARD REES JONES

Mount Vernon Arts Lab E for Experimental

OCHRE RECORDS OCH013LCD CD
(1999)

Hoots mon! I was all set to give this dinky little CD a hard time - but in fact it's

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entertaining enough and to the right pair of ears surely quite irresistible. Don't let the title kid you. As musical activities go, it's quite some way from truly 'experimental', but as pastiches of avant-garde heritage go, it's nowhere near as smarmy as the kitschy dribblings of the ghastrly Stereolab. As the sole mad scientist of the 'Lab', Drew Mulholland deservedly occupies his own field of research with these jolly electronic tunes and atmospheric sounds. Equipped with an impressive collection of retro equipment, Drew has built up an extensive résumé of releases which are collected here from a series of long unavailable EPs and singles on labels such as Earworm, Via-Satellite, Enraptured, Trunk, Vesuvius and After Hours - with added live

recordings and demo tapes. It's fair to say he wears some of his groovy influences on his sleeve, incorporating by the power of suggestion pop culture references which are guaranteed to trigger the automatic wow-factor from audiences even before the music is heard - and these include the Radiophonic Workshop, Suicide, Tangerine Dream and any piece of musical hardware that contains valves, oscillators, or analogue circuitry. Nothing wrong with this of course. Even the title 'E For Experimental' might be part of the same nostalgic alphabet that starts with 'A For Andromeda', the legendary BBC TV science fiction series that no-one's ever seen, but which everyone somehow 'remembers' as being absolutely brilliant. The reason for this appears to be because it's one of the many broadcasts good enough to have been wiped from the BBC archive. For my other comments on 'false memory implants', see elsewhere.

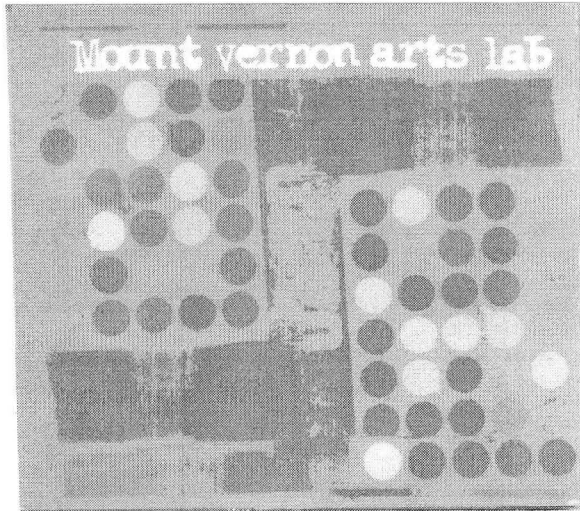
ED PINSENT



Nigel Avers, John Overall and Mick Harris **Mesmeric Enabling Device** USA, SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS SOL 85 CD (1999)

I'm starting to wonder if we shouldn't change the name of the magazine to *The Soleilmoon Projector*. Here's yet another one from the label, to go with the other 500 reviewed herein. This time it's a collaboration between he of Nocturnal Emissions, Mick Harris of Scorn and John Overall who seems to have been in most bands formed over the last twenty years, but I remember best as one the few writers for the late *Music From The Empty Quarter* magazine that I could be bothered to read. Nigel does things to pieces supplied by John and Mick, who in turn do things to some of Nigel's stuff.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that this isn't the easiest of music to dance to, beyond doing the Standing Still, and neither could it be described as a relaxing Ambient drone. Although nothing overt or sudden leaps out from the vast fields of reverb, it's too dark to be comforting. If I might digress briefly, I once had the pleasure of knowing Tommy Docherty. Not the football bloke, but a less famous namesake who dabbled in making weird music on cassette. His finest moment was an eight or nine minute track called 'Words Cannot Describe', recorded with hopelessly humble equipment and somehow utilising sounds echoing along the interior of an enormous aluminium pipeline he'd found somewhere. The eerie sustained



roar he'd produced bypassed the limitations of his recording equipment, and resulted in one of the few pieces of music I've heard which I was genuinely unable to play with the lights off, unless overcome with some perverse desire to shit myself. Although I'm older now and less inclined to be spooked by such things, there are parts of *Mesmeric Enabling Device* which strongly remind me of Tommy Docherty's masterpiece, certainly in terms of power and tonality.

Mind you, it isn't all variations on a slab, as the above might suggest. Among the cavernous expanses we find a few elements of the unexpected. There's some distant tinkly melody on the second of the seven untitled tracks, which actually rather detracts from the general atmosphere. Later on we get random heartbeats and a rhythm that suggests someone's typewriter has got sick of all those words and is auditioning for the office supplies Junglist posse. It's a rhythm, but not really a beat. Mr Ayers seems to do well working in collaboration, and this holds its own alongside previous efforts with C.C.C.C., Robin Storey, and Randy Greif. I haven't tried listening with lights off as yet. It hardly seems a worthwhile experiment. By the end of the last track even a brightly lit room with the midday sun streaming through bay windows will seem like the setting for an H. P. Lovecraft finale. The protagonist finally tracks down the subterranean horrors responsible for the cavity wall insulation of the house he inherited from that uncle, the one nobody liked to talk about.

WAR ARROW

87 Central

87 Central

NETHERLANDS, ERS 12/03 VINYL LP
(1999)

Of great interest for the fine effects achieved by the electronic re-processing and manipulation of a cello. This is done by 87 Central - in reality Jeff Carey - working with feedback loops and a big mixing board, from acoustic sources. On the long track on side two, 'Kalimba Cello System', he is not merely showing off his equipment and indulging his technique - rather, he creates a quite beautiful passage of slow music, understated and filled with nostalgic longing, which stays pretty much in the same place for just the right length of time. It starts out near-empty and only when you reach the bittersweet ending do you realise the surprising number of minimal accretions it has gathered. 500 years in the life of a seashell, witnessed in 15 minutes. You won't want it to ever end! A limited vinyl pressing of 500 copies only on this Staalplaat imprint.

ED PINSENT



Electroshock

I Woke Up Brain Dead

GERMANY, ÜTON CD 14 CD (1999)

Five young German men get together in the studio and concoct this contemporary mish-mash of sound experiments for our delectation. Hey listeners, guess what? It's a 'challenging' mélange of jazz and electronic music - as if nobody ever thought of doing *that* before. The chief drawback is that the alto saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan, whose blurtish brass lines decorate the surface of the electronic backdrops, is about as distinctive as a wet teabag lying limp in a catering skip, and has about as much swing feeling as a meeting of your local Mothers Union. But hey, let's give the poor fucker a chance. If the sax is not to your taste, let your ears fall back on the fabbo analogue electronic noises pooped out by Konrad Döppert on the synth, Joker Nies on the sampler and Dr Borg mangling his electric guitar. And if you think you're in for some boredom relief, you're sadly mistaken, because this is the kind of unrelieved tedium that'll have you marching down to your local music shop with a wild gleam in your eye and dousing all the Casio keyboards with kerosene. Yep, it's a fairly misbegotten musical adventure on the whole. Have I mentioned Richard Teitelbaum before? Oh, I know I have! Now there's a guy you should check out - while the world remained largely indifferent, he continued to make fantastic music, combining his Moog synth with jazz sax (mostly that of Anthony Braxton) on several LPs in the mid 1970s, while these German jokers were still pigging out on strudel at their cousin's house. Only if you too are feeling 'brain dead' could you stand to listen to this ghastly release in its entirety.

ED PINSENT

From Helmholtzstrasse 5, D-51145,
Cologne, Germany



The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

Bass Communion V Muslingauze Bass Communion V Muslingauze

USA, SOLEILMOON RECORDINGS
SOL89 CD (1999)

The title alone excites me with the same frisson I once experienced at the prospect of a *Teen Titans V X-Men* comic. Wow! What will they get up to having had the obligatory superhero punch-up resulting doubtlessly from a minor misunderstanding? Will Cyclops make moves on the girl with the considerable assets? Will Wolverine duff Jericho up for being a girl's skipping rope with pink handles? The tension! The drama! What form will the conflict take? A battle of wits, a few rounds of gin rummy, or the more unorthodox approach unofficially favoured by cub scouts involving clenched fists, a slice of bread and dirty thoughts?

Muslingauze produced almost exclusively rhythmic percussion-based music. I've only heard one other CD by Bass Communion, which is (if I recall correctly) quite devoid of rhythm. Steven Wilson, the grand poobah behind the aforementioned name, instead seems to favour ethereal atmospheric pieces. With these salient facts in mind it seemed not unreasonable to expect an album of Mr Wilson's organ wizardry accompanied by the talking bongos of Mr Jones. In other words, two CDs of the respective artists being played at the same time.

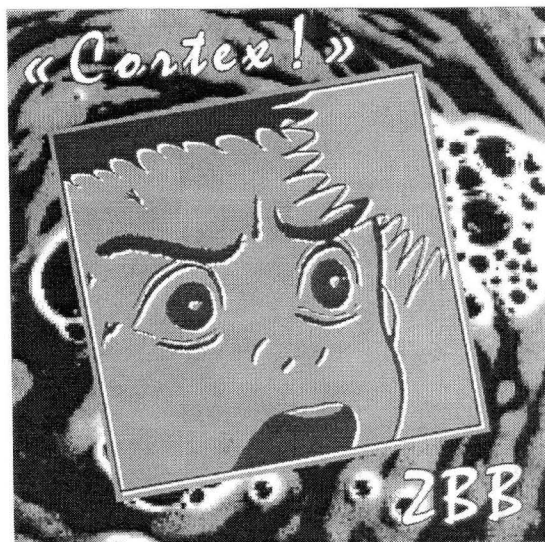
This in itself could be good, but whatever approach was taken, the end result is much greater than the sum of its parts. Much of this sounds quite different to the individual combatants' own stuff, making it less obvious who did what than you'd imagine. Those rhythms are there, angle-grinded into a variant on drum and bass which just happens to turn towards Mecca in prayer a few times a day. The tracks herein contain more depth and more layers than on recent Muslingauze offerings, with patterns of gritty electronics wandering absent-mindedly around the rhythms. Each contributor seems to have had a profound influence on the other, making for a rounded symbiotic whole quite different in feel to solo releases by either. In view of what I've heard of the last Muslingauze albums, turned out onto CD at a rate that makes the newspaper printing industry seem like a handmade rural knick-knack operation, this is a very good thing. This proves that with a little imagination there can be a lot more to drum and bass than the black clothes-wearing conspiracy theorist bore-core or saggy-arsed space fag soundtracks that 90% of the genre's enthusiasts seem to think is indicative of their inherent superiority over people who actually work for a living.

There is apparently another similar collaboration between these two awaiting release, which should be eagerly anticipated by anyone with functioning ears. It's a shame that, for obvious reasons, this is all we're likely to get. But even with there being little more where this came from, we at least now know that the bulk of Bryn Jones' last recordings weren't entirely lacking inspiration. It might be worth looking out for this Bass Communion feller in future. A name to watch methinks. A thoroughly classy CD

which will thrill the discerning listener. Also, there's some fish on the cover. Which is nice.

WAR ARROW

*More Muslingauze records are unspooled in THE DRONING ONES section
A double CD by Bass Communion is within
Chris Atton's column*



Zircon and the Burning Brains

«Cortex!»

ULTIMATE TRANSMISSIONS UTCD 001
CD (1999)

ZBB were Steve and Alan Freeman, working with the help of their friend Nigel Harris. The Freemans have carved a rather unique niche for themselves in the world of record-collecting: they own and operate the Ultima Thule record shop and mail order service in Leicester, reputed to be one of the finest emporiums in the world for securing original vinyl copies of progressive rock and experimental music records. They regularly produce *Audion*, a magazine dedicated to collating facts about such music. And they issued the enormous Krautrock encyclopaedia *A Crack In The Cosmic Egg*, which in terms of its sheer exhaustiveness manages to eclipse any other work on the subject.

I was as surprised as anyone to learn that they have a history of making their own music too. Turns out they have a fair-sized back catalogue going back to 1981, and this release represents the first CD issue of a cassette they originally put out in 1984. I was also surprised to find it's quite a creditable showing - using some very tasty analogue synth sounds, echo effects, tape collage, distorted solemn voices (some of them speaking in French, for some reason) and a fun-loving anything-goes spirit, they succeed in creating some genuinely bizarre and unsettling, minimalist electronic experiments. With their constant growling bass notes and strange interruptions of illogical electronic blips, these long mysterious pieces don't exactly gladden a dispirited mind. They lay there in the dark and brood...like some eerie pulsating mineral from another planet.

The slightly irritating aspect (for this listener) is the added commentary - which is written by the Freemans themselves, very much in the inept style of their *Audion* magazine. They're certainly enthused, but they lapse into making lame comparisons very frequently. Now I know we do this here at *The Sound Projector* too. In writing, I think

this technique is permissible once in a while to help orient the listener, but the Freemans do it *all the time* - there's no LP they've heard that can't be compared to another LP they've heard. And it's not always meaningful influences they're looking for, genuine or significant connections; all they can discern is similarity of sounds. When they start applying the same 'it-sounds-like...' game to their *own* work, I for one become a tad suspicious. To their credit, the Freemans are not afraid of being accused of eclecticism. But I feel they're pre-empting criticism, eliminating any work the listener may have to do - all the usual suspects are trotted out in a dreary

little checklist for you. This even extends to the name of their combo, a cocktail mix involving the Polish band SBB, Frank Zappa, and a track from the first Tangerine Dream LP. And this namechecking doesn't do their own music any favours. Once a band claims to have been influenced by everything from Stockhausen to Suicide to Krautrock to Nurse With Wound and Pierre Henry, their music can start to assume the proportions of a knowing pastiche of all the above. Have they learned anything from these musicians, in terms of technique, compositional methods, creative ideas? Or have they simply copycatted the weird sounds from their voluminous record collections?

Well, my advice (to myself) is to put all these doubts aside and listen to the music. Remove the mental baggage, ignore their somewhat high-flown claims, don't even think of reading the ghastly fragment of 'poetry' - and chances are you're in for a good time. This record remains intriguing, fresh and strangely compelling.

ED PINSENT

*Ultima Thule, 1 Conduit Street, Leicester
LE2 0JN. UK*

★★★★★
**Are
compilations of
electronic music
necessary?**

**See over for an appraisal
of two excellent
brick-sized digests of
noise ➡**

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

Various Artists

They've got the whole world in their hands

GERMANY, METHODS TO SURVIVE
NETWORK SYSTEM SURVIVE 001 2 X
CD (1999)

Various Artists

Modulation and

Transformation 4

GERMANY, MILLE PLATEAUX MP 3CD
61 3 X CD (1999)

Is it my imagination, or is everything becoming more excessive these days? Time was I thought bulky Sunday Papers were frowned upon by Green-inspired idealists, as wasting the world's paper resources by printing tons of useless 'Lifestyle' supplements which nobody ever reads. Nowadays you need a pantechonicon to get *The Observer* back to your flat. And CDs, alas, are getting thicker, longer, more voluminous. Here are a mere two examples of the kind of gargantuan home entertainment package the music listener is frequently faced with these days - a double CD and a triple CD. But this is a case where excess genuinely means success. Both of these come highly recommended, and, erm...for different reasons.

Compilations - what a daft notion. Some time ago when I still used to go to art galleries regularly, in the early 1980s, it seemed to be de rigueur to pack a group exhibition with as many artists as possible - at least 50 or 60 names seemed to be the favoured option, with an accompanying catalogue as thick as a paperback crammed full of pretentious statements bolstering the threadbare conceits these no-hope, never-seen-again daubers. Usually the only linking factor - or 'theme' if you will - would be that the limners in question were all based in the same dead-end provincial town. The hapless visitor to such a show would be faced with an indigestible melange of mismatched artistic styles - riotous colour-field paintings next to austere minimalists, photo-realist Nazis next to cod-Surrealist mugs with their dumb renderings of 'shocking' images, like the Mayor and Corporation posing next to a nude lady...you get the idea. Visually, this kind of ill-conceived array made no sense whatsoever and made for an unsatisfying experience to your eyeballs, besides giving you sore tootsies. Yet I recall one lame critic defending one such show on the grounds that there was 'something for everyone here'. That's as maybe, but it's like treating the art as a huge buffet of food on cocktail trays, and the viewer as a snacking yuppy moving freely from dish to dish, sampling as they may. If you don't like anchovies, try the pastrami - there's 'something for everyone'. Bah! In the end, I believe, that sort of approach to art does no favours for anyone...

Somehow, however, just the opposite applies to modern compilations of electronic music. Here, excess is good - necessary, even. When

I grab hold of these things nowadays, I want a brick-sized digest of noise - as much as I can possibly listen to, and if there aren't at least 30 artists represented I feel cheated! In fact, I'd venture to say that compilations like these are the best way to steer yourself in to these uncharted realms of music, and not just because 'you're bound to find something you like', as our blithely optimistic art critic quoted above might say. No, it's the sheer volume of material that makes the difference - you can completely immerse yourself and wallow in the golden lard, because ingesting a Farouk-sized slabette of music like this is like travelling the length and breadth of an imaginary continent, meeting with the indigenous peoples, feeling strange grass under your feet, and bathing in foreign waters teeming with monstrous fish. Here, mysteries can be solved - one track can help explain another, in the same way that the influence of civilisations on one another can be discerned across centuries by anthropologists. Harlan Ellison, that pompous science fiction writer, did one small favour to the world by compiling the *Dangerous Visions* series - and one of his many wordy justifications for the schemes that he followed as an editor was simply that stories could help sell each other. A famous name in a book (Thomas M Disch) will help attract attention to a not-so-famous name (James Sallis). Through the right

to - who has the time? Let the experience flow over you, and enjoy it for what it is...an hour of dynamic ebb and flow, filled with tension. In time, you might grow to appreciate one particular track and identify the artist, seek out further examples of their work...only to be massively disappointed. You could find a whole CD is not necessary, or the artist may have moved on to other territories anyway. It made a whole lot more sense when the context was right.

The Mille Plateaux compilation, wrapped in a fine 'blank' looking package with fold outs and cryptic symbols and messages printed on the insert, is merely the fourth in a series of world-class electronic music compilations from a Rolls-Royce label of modern electronica, and it features 38 outstanding cuts by contemporary artists - the crème de la crème! Many splinters of the international 'scene' are represented. Minimalism from Ryoji Ikeda and Noto; cut-ups and skipping CDs from Pluramon and Lithops; gallery installation art from Achim Wollscheid; avant-DJing from Consume and DJ Paedophile, DJ Spooky, Mouse on Mars and Marcus Schmickler of 10A Musik. Also represented are Christophe Charles, Terre Theamlitz, SND, Rehberg and Bauer; UK artists Techno Animal and Scanner; Japanese noise god Masami Akita, with Kouhei Matsunage; Steel, Robert Babicz, Gas, Thomas Köner, Panacea,

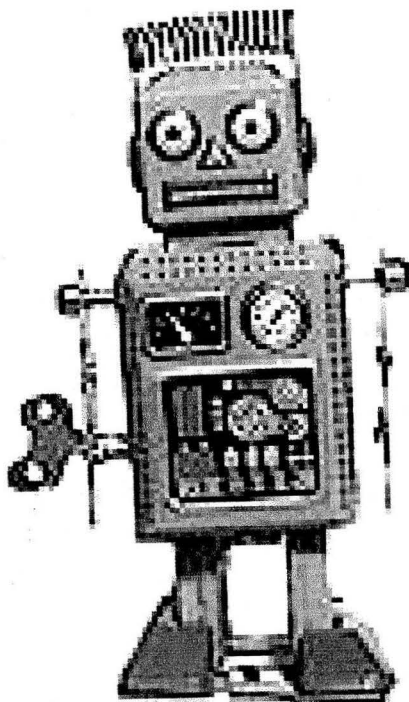
Andy Mellwig...the list goes on. I guarantee there is not a single dull item hereon and it's worth every penny - if you can still find a copy. Hardly a vocal track in sight, and in fact the only voices you hear are usually sampled and / or treated - so the glacial atmosphere can appear to lack a human dimension. Yet to dwell for a long time in the land of the exotic instrumental can have a very calming and mysterious effect on your psyche.

The Methods To Survive one by contrast is quite weird and disjunctive (in the best possible way), featuring a whole string of unreleased tracks by Muslingauze, Masonna, Illusion Of Safety, The Vance Orchestra, Kingdom Scum, Mleht, S-Core, Arno Peeteres, Michael Wells, Tornow, MOWE / Verwerter and others, everything packaged together in a disruptive, random sequence aiming for maximum shock / surprise effect. There's noise, drum and bass, feedback, jolly synth toons, documentary recordings, and large segments of the just plain unidentifiable. It works - like a dose of radium poisoning. I have the impression it's some form of gigantic art-prank remix networking project by The Methods, who are six strange young men from East Berlin. It's divided up into six sections, framed by verité recordings of these jokers larking about at a private gathering, yet has no coherent structure that I

can perceive. It's perplexing, a great and glorious mess. Oh yes, something for everyone here...

ED PINSENT

See IN THE ART GALLERY for another fabulous huge-o compilation - *Tulpas* by RLW



context, a story will mean a lot more. And there are more than enough echoes and cross-fertilisations going on these two music compilations to keep you occupied for months.

Listening to these things 'blind' is not a crime. You don't have to name-check every single artist on these discs. I certainly don't intend



“The Japanese do it with more *kindness*”

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Yoshihide



Interview By Ed Pinsent

FRESH FROM HIS SUCCESS CURATING AN INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL IN Austria, Otomo Yoshihide landed briefly in London in the Winter of 1999. Actually his story is pretty well-known already - if you've read two very good interviews one by Ed Baxter in *Resonance* and one by Clive Bell in *The Wire* 185. Since the beginning of the 1990s, through numerous solo projects involving an...erm...very innovative use of turntables, live electronics and electric guitar, the Japanese musician Otomo Yoshihide has constantly attempted to shock, startle, alarm and amaze the listener with an overload of weird juxtapositions, tape edits, strange sounds, heart-stopping dynamics and excessive volume. Some recent solo records include *Digital Tranquillizer*, *Memory Defacement* and *Vinyl Tranquillizer* - the last accurately described by the Metamkine catalogue as 'Rien de tranquille ici, au contraire'. This strange and new approach to music-making seemed unprecedented. His use of the turntable alone should win him some kind of prize - his acrobatic

cavorts around the wheel of steel gave most rap and hip-hop artists some pretty stiff competition, and his gleeful destruction and disintegration of vinyl records pointed to a complex love-hate relationship with the slices of 'black stuff' that clutter up our lives.

The strategy of excess reached some kind of zenith with the incredible Ground-Zero band. This became a large enclave, boasting a roster of nearly a dozen players in its final incarnation, and sometimes seemed to be like a cult of devotees under the benign leadership of Otomo, highly-efficient crack troops whose mastery of their instruments meant they could turn on a dime without even pausing for breath. The Ground-Zero insect-monster grew...its many legs all marching relentlessly towards the same goal of producing mind-crushing, body-slamming, remorseless violence in

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music. They achieved a huge sound, freely melded 'out' jazz, psychedelia, rock and electronics and rolled it around in a huge ball like a dung-beetle, and frightened the unwary listener. 1996's *Revolutionary Pekinese Opera* (see *Sound Projector* 2) was one of their most amazing records, a scary roller-coaster ride through a sort of media-saturation hell, packed with incredibly fast ensemble playing and liberal use of colliding TV and movie clip samples. Such sampling play was already a cliché then, but Otomo did it with a rare imagination and power. As Clive Bell has observed, at their peak Ground-Zero emphasised that the world we live in is crammed with far too much information coming at us all the time, and we're in danger of sensory overload. The thing is, Otomo predicted this before it even happened - now, with the Internet, TV coverage of everything, billboards invading every possible empty space, 700 Playstation games on the racks at every Virgin megastore, and pop music played in every public space - the world really is like a Ground-Zero record.



In spite of his remarkable achievements, Otomo perhaps began to sense a certain personal dissatisfaction with the direction his work was taking. The *Consume-Red* project, for example, while resulting in some astonishing results, had a certain nihilism at its core. There were three releases in the trilogy, of which the third was a wilfully planned, highly competitive remix project involving international star noise-makers. The intention was to reduce the original recording to mincemeat, as if by making something already loud and chaotic even more loud and chaotic, Otomo could somehow efface the excesses of Ground-Zero's slash and burn missions. The same way that Vietnam soldiers tried to win an unwinnable battle by becoming even more violent. Otomo had started with AK rifles and hand grenades, but now he was moving onto the Napalm. But it was destructive - if the Ground-Zero monster had started life as a giant locust, eating entire fields of crops in an hour, now it consumed everything - and was starting to feed on itself.

In a sense, Ground-Zero had become the nearest equivalent to a 'dinosaur group' for the 1990s - and that term was of course bandied around in the 1970s by UK music journalists to identify the sworn 'enemies' of Punk Rock. Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd were both prime examples of dinosaurs, but then were Led Zeppelin ever as loud and mighty as Ground-Zero? And Pink Floyd could only dream of the mastery of electronic equipment that Otomo's army displayed. With great deliberation, Otomo planned a series of farewell concerts for the group, and I saw one at the London Musicians' Collective festival in 1997 (see SP issue 3), for which we have Ed Baxter the organiser to thank. The explosive live version of *Consume Red* was overpowering enough, but the psychedelic Japanese tune they closed the show with was an absolute eulogy - a truly moving experience. The same emotion is evident on another 'farewell' performance, documented on the ReR double CD featuring Cassiber. And don't forget the *Last Concert* CD on Alcohol and Amoebic records, reviewed this issue.

Quite a few tearful goodbye concerts there, don't you think? About as many farewell appearances as The Who...the repetition of this long goodbye suggested to me that there was a strong ceremonial aspect to Otomo's disbanding of the group. He wanted to draw a line - and do it emphatically. In classical Japanese culture, isn't there a ceremonial aspect to almost everything - from pouring and drinking tea, to committing ritual suicide? Ground-Zero went through all the steps of Hara-Kiri and did it in public, leaving us only the raw entrails to sift through.

Then, worrying about the huge bills that this expensive band had run up, and beset by personal problems, Otomo retreated from this cruel world for a few months. He sat in his Tokyo apartment and rediscovered his beloved Manga - Japanese comics - collection, specifically the favourites from the days of his youth, and found comfort there, if not even a touch of inspiration. He then bounced back with a new band, a new sound and a new direction. Even the old name had to go - Ground-Zero was too powerful a name, too redolent of atomic warfare and creating too many expectations for the listener. I.S.O. was the new band - and it was stronger, leaner, fitter than Ground-Zero - and far quieter! It was also more egalitarian (the name of the band is taken from the initials of the players); Otomo was happy to relinquish the responsibility of being the leader, and let the trio share the exciting experiences of making new musical discoveries together.

Into this new project he brought Sachiko Matsubara, his girlfriend who had also played the sampler in Ground-Zero (specifically providing the haunting sound of the hojok repeated in *Consume Red*). Fully on board with Otomo's programme of austerity, she famously 'emptied her sampler' of all captured sounds and presets. She played the sampler to generate nothing but 'pure' sine wave tones, a strategy she also used to great effect on her record for Amoebic, *Sine Wave Solo*. Otomo returned to playing one of his first instruments, the guitar, and played it extremely quietly, inspired by new young musicians in Tokyo who were doing likewise. There was and is a small but growing backlash against the brutal guitar noise that has become associated with Tokyo, out of which some people (Keiji Haino, High Rise, Musica Transonic) have been doing quite nicely. Ichiraku Yoshimitsu - the 'funny guy' drummer - completed the trio, perhaps not quite sure how he could add value, and until he found his voice he kept changing what he was doing on the international tour the band embarked upon. The difference between ISO and Ground-Zero was immediately

beneficial to Otomo's mental health, however - it was cheaper, and far more portable - only a few light instruments and little amplification sufficed. It must have been like leaving Emerson Lake and Palmer to become a solo triangle player! He started to actually enjoy going on the road and playing live again.

By the time they landed in London, ISO were already sufficiently together to record the impressive CD for Alcohol records, with the help of Xentos. This was released in 1999. Other records they have made include *Gravity Clock* on Amoebic Records in Japan, and a live CD on Zero Gravity records taken from radio and live concert performances in Japan and Marseilles. As Filament, Otomo and Matsubara have made one record for Extreme.



A memorable weekend in October 1999 allowed a handful of fortunate Londoners a chance to see in succession a performance by AMM, followed by one by Otomo with Keith Rowe and the Japanese guitarist Taku Sugimoto. AMM (30 October 1999, The Warehouse on Theed Street London SE1) rarely perform these days. These venerable Englishmen - Edwin Prevost, Keith Rowe and John Tilbury - remain without doubt the apogee of excellence in English improvisation. What struck me this time - as if I finally noticed it! - is how these guys are such minimalists. They hardly seem to make a move at all during playing. What little movement there is, is deliberate and carefully chosen. This is in contrast to the fact that the music has no end of things going on within it - it is incredibly deep, spacious, and surrounds everything like a thin grey fog. AMM appear, rather than creating music, simply to be revealing something that was there all along. The radio samples used by Keith Rowe are a clue - sound is all around us now all the time, but you don't hear it until you 'tune in' your body's personal radio set. AMM are exhorting us to tune in our own in-built sensory crystal to the right waveband, and the message is revealed.

Group improvisation, through AMM, becomes less of an attempt for players to express themselves, solo or in harmony; and more of a collective attempt to lift the veil on the unknowable, through the world of sound.

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The audience too have a crucial part to play in the process. We're there to listen - I mean really LISTEN - and to give back emotion to the band. It's a two-way communication, a genuine process of sharing. We're not just having the music spread onto us, as passive receivers; but if we pay attention and move with the vibrations, we can actively feed in to the work.

Otomo saw AMM perform some years ago in Japan. Although he's not keen to emulate classic 'call and response' improvisation of the Company school, which he finds too schematic and predictable, Otomo is certainly keen to emulate AMM's compassionate approach in his new quieter music. To play quiet music is to ask the audience a question. Ground-Zero in contrast tended to obliterate audience response - and if we weren't listening, all Otomo could do was make everything louder! The concert he played with Keith Rowe and Taku Sugimoto, a sublime Japanese guitarist, at The Spitz, London, on 31 October 1999 amply demonstrated that he is fully capable of involving us in a truly meditative and near-spiritual way - everyone in the audience went totally silent.

I think they were playing together as a trio for the first time, after the initiative of Keith Rowe (he likes the challenge). Sugimoto was frankly excellent, playing his very quiet sustained harmonics and simple chords. Not in any hurry to 'get his balls on display' - as Derek Bailey observes is a problem with some gung-ho European improvisors. Once he found a perfect musical figure he was happy to repeat it for as long as necessary. All of this was intercut with some first-rate malarkey from Rowe - a really hot player on the hand-held fan blowing air over the strings - and Otomo's sublime feedback. Again, that minimal movement was observable - when the players reached that trance of stasis that is the Nirvana of improvising, their limbs, fingers and feet were barely moving at all, afraid to disturb the tranquillity. Long electronic notes were just hanging there, shimmering like the Northern Lights in the sky.

Before he moved on to another concert in Russia, Otomo found time to record a session for the BBC *Mixing It* programme, and give this interview to *The Sound Projector* on 1 November 1999 in London. May I say in print what a charming gentleman this musician is? Warm and approachable, and very modest about his remarkable work. As a comics fan myself, I thought I'd start off by showing him a few samples of weird Japanese underground Manga I've managed to accumulate in my hoard, just to see if Otomo could enlighten me.



OTOMO: I was grown up with Manga, before the music. When I was six or five years old, I started reading Manga. There's really a lot of variation! Some popular manga, underground, and for adults, for kids, for girls, for boys, for women, for men...porno manga, everything! There's no shame [about reading Manga in public], it's quite a special culture, in Japan everyone reads it. In the street, in the subway. (Looking at American compilation book) That's from a comic called Garo, it's one of the famous Underground comics. 1970s...maybe end of 1960s. I like his stuff!

EP: I really enjoyed the concert last night, at The Spitz. The three guitarists - Taku Sugimoto, Keith Rowe, yourself...very very good. Is that the first time you've played as a trio?

OTOMO: Yeh, first time. First time I've played with Keith Rowe. I don't know who made the idea [to play together]. It's not clear...I asked him to play together, and also someone organised the concert with Taku and Keith in France, and that was I think the beginning. Then I asked him to come to Austria to play together, that will be next week. So then Keith Rowe - maybe Keith Rowe [or] Ed Baxter [had the idea]. I'm not sure. They decided to set something up. I've played with Taku before, in Japan.

EP: Can you tell me more about Taku? His playing was just wonderful - wonderful music. Never heard of him before, and...

OTOMO: I'm not sure about his history. I don't know his background, but I first met him maybe two or three years ago. I bought his CD in Japan. He does very different style to typical Japanese underground music. Because before that, always Japanese underground music is just really LOUD! Of course, I love that...I'm one of them! But Taku's style is very different - but still very good tension, very quiet, but very good tension. Nothing similar to anyone. Very special. Then I went to his concert. Someone introduced me - finally I met him to make some concerts together and it was amazing, because he keep play[ing] very softly. Sometimes I play very loud but still I could hear his sound. I play loud, then stop, then he sounded like...very difficult to say, it's like a very interesting landscape - a very interesting map. I've never had this kind of experience before him.

EP: I noticed last night, as you said, he was playing very quietly, and I think you were making some feedback, suddenly a big wave of feedback coming in and even though you were quite loud and quite intense you could still hear everything Taku was doing, the presence was there. Remarkable! Very powerful!

OTOMO: I'm really not interested in just response-improvisation. I mean if someone play DAH! then I play KAAAAAA! KAAAA! [I'm] completely not interested in this kind of call and response. It's just like a kind of scheme. But Taku's style, it's really like a kind of deep collaboration together. And the last two or three years, some of [the] Japanese new musicians play also kind of his style. I mean, not similar, but some are play[ing] very quietly. For me, [the] feeling is very similar. Like Akiyama Tetsuji - [he's] really not famous, but he's kind of one of them. He's also a guitarist and he worked with Taku [for] maybe more than fifteen years. Also Toshimaru Nakamura. These two guys [were] making a concert at the Bar Aoyama. That [venue] is in Tokyo. Very small! Almost like the size of this kitchen. Always full of the people - but full means just twenty or something! But younger people come. And the story of the place, always one or two guests. Like sometimes I join, and also lot of young musicians like Sachiko M, she plays sampler. And Utah Kawasaki. She plays broken synthesiser! Really interesting. Half-broken. A kind of out-out-control synthesiser. She also [is] very very quiet. And Sachiko plays not loud but just makes one frequency, really sharp [and] focused. She also doesn't play too much...then after ten minutes another frequency...very very interesting.

EP: Last night what I thought was that all of you hardly seemed to be moving at all. Very very slight movements. The same with AMM on Saturday, and yet the music is so powerful and deep and there's so much going on. And yet it's so...not just minimal, it's...like they don't set out to make a tremendous effort. It's very simple.

OTOMO: There are a lot of elements, yeh. I have really found, for me, the last maybe two years, [I] get a lot of influence from Taku. Yes, Sachiko also - I live with her, so that's maybe too much influence from her! After [I] finished the Ground-Zero, I'm a little bit lost. Maybe few months, yeh.

EP: Was it something of a crisis period?

OTOMO: Yes, and not only musical. Personal, relationships, also financial. Lot of stories! Because it was [a] quite big band, Ground-Zero. I mean - the last one [had] eleven members! I'm not good for the business side. Chaos! Yeh, [I was] a little bit lost. Not seriously, but two months I just stayed in my apartment, with Manga! And in this two months I read lot of Manga. Not new ones. From 1960s. That's when I was kid. There's a lot of reissues now. So [I read] just that kind of older stuff. Just for...relax. Then I re-started. And after few months I really felt refreshed...and now, just really found the feeling [from] when I started music, and it was just for fun.



ISO - the trio

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EP: So you rediscovered why you wanted to do it in the first place.

OTOMO: Yeh, yeh. I think so, I think so. My first place was a kind of improvised music. Or maybe free jazz.

EP: So you put together I.S.O. As I've said already I'm very impressed - all I've heard is the one CD that you recorded in London, Ed Baxter put it out, Xentos produced it...but it seemed to me that there was a very deliberate decision to try something quite different. And you've explained you felt a bit overwhelmed by what happened with Ground-Zero.

OTOMO: Yeh, that was just after the three months Manga-time! The Ground-Zero was like my only band [as a leader]. But I.S.O. is different. Three members, and equal - and I'm not leader. So I'm just one of the players. Total improvisation. Just at the beginning of I.S.O. it was quite different - some composition stuff, but now it's totally improvised. Around that time, I think it was last year, last springtime, we did a two month tour in Europe, and maybe we did more than 30 or 40 concerts. Usually this kind of tour just makes [me] tired, but it was very fun for us because every night we find new things. And after finishing the concert we always talked about music idea. That was really...lovely, for me! Really really fun! Then finally we recorded in London.

EP: By that time, the percussionist had stopped playing percussion?

OTOMO: Yeh, yeh. Strange guy! Always changing! Last time, he play just drum without electric, but maybe next time he just play maybe guitar or I don't know! He always changing!

Funny guy! I don't know why [my music] changed, but maybe I just come back from my beginning. But of course now it's almost end of the century. It's a different order from the 1970s. My feelings [went] back to the beginning but still we are in end of the century. [So we can't ignore] digital and modern technology in I.S.O.

EP: It's very important I think, not to lose sight of what got you interested in the first place. I respect the fact that you wanted to stop Ground-Zero. I think there was almost a ceremony to the way that you dismantled it, and dissolved the group. Is that true?

OTOMO: Sorry, could you give it to me more easily? A ritual? Ah-ah-ah! Yes, I really needed it. Yeh, maybe it's like a ceremony, that's true. I have to say to the people: 'I stop the Ground-Zero!' I needed that.

Otherwise... I really wanted to change, around that time. But if I use a [similar] name like Ground-Zero, it's quite difficult. The name was wrong...because Ground-Zero has a strong image for the sound. That was the idea. But from the beginning of Ground-Zero, that was my reality. I'm not against my past, but I want to change. Yes, that's true, maybe it was a kind of ceremony.

EP: With Keiji Haino, I've only seen him perform a couple of times, but every performance appears to have a kind of ceremony about it. The lights have to be turned out, nobody must make a noise, and if you do make a noise he won't play, and I respect that...it's very important to have a sense of purpose...and occasion. And especially if you don't stop a group, you'll end up like The Rolling Stones! You'll just play until you're seventy years old!

OTOMO: (laughter) Ah-ah-ah-ah!

EP: You've said somewhere else in an interview [with Clive Bell] that the world caught up with Ground-Zero. Ground-Zero had a vision of how the world would be, which was 'too much information' - and now suddenly there IS too much information. So it's like you were a prophet. You predicted the way the world was gonna go.

OTOMO: Yes, the interviewer asked me about that then. Maybe I just say by stranded my work...but my idea is not like a [query], just a kind of...just music idea is going to like that. Afterwards, now I know I just change from too-much-information...but the beginning is not from this word, just I like to do that! You understand? My music ideas are always not from language, not from the [written] word, just something I like. It's a feeling. Afterwards, someone asks me 'Is that right?' then [I might reply] 'Maybe, yes!' Maybe it's true about the information overload, because in the middle of the 1990s I really needed a lot of information [to do music]. Like if I play sampler, I need a really big [computer] memory, but now I really don't need a big

memory, just a few memory is enough....

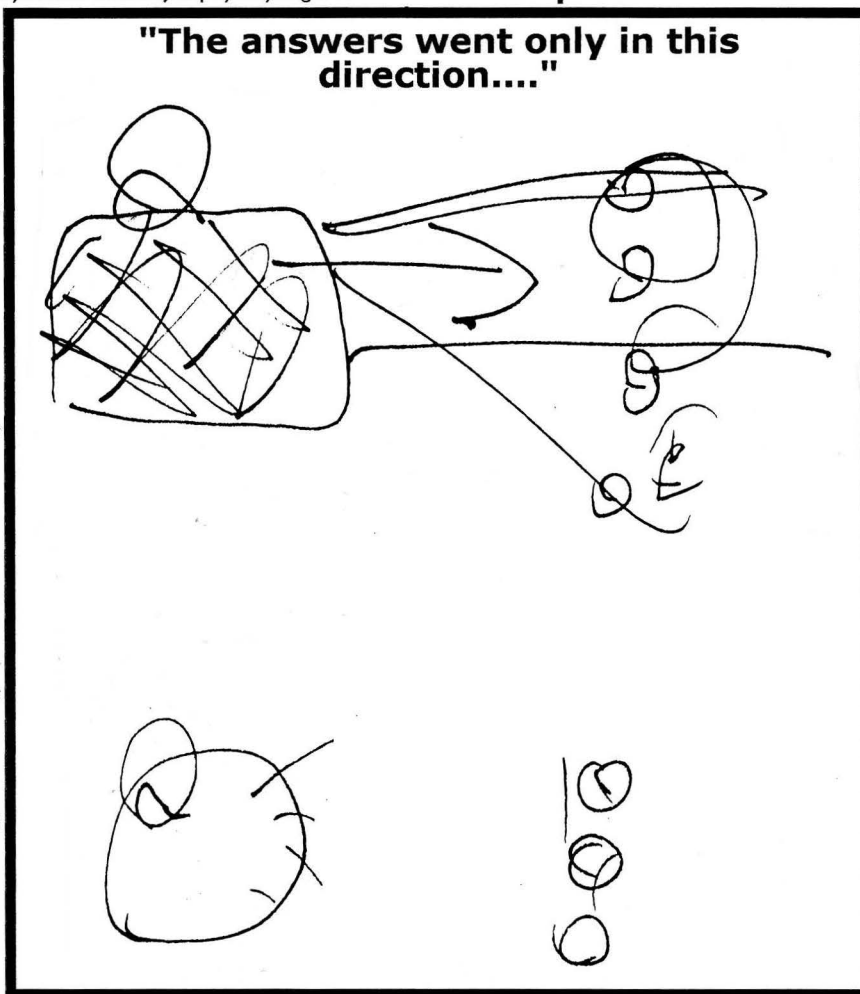
EP...because now you're not using so many sampler presets, just playing sinewaves...

OTOMO: Even physically I think...just to play [any] musical instrument is just a kind of memory. If someone plays [the] chord B-flat minor, that's a memory, physically. Of course, I'm not against the memory. But I think to create physical music also, behind it, is a lot of memory. I think the sampling memory is a kind of the same thing. Last night, when I played guitar, of course I play - but I don't play like jazz guitar. I'm interested in just one guitar note. One feedback. That's the kind of same idea as when I play without [computer] memory. Last night also I play guitar without the physical memory. I have memory, of course, but I don't need it too much! One good point is I really don't have a

good memory, so...I don't need [to] try, I just always forget everything [anyway], so...no problem!

EP: I think with what you're doing now, you give more time, and space, and freedom to the listener. The audience - it's not like a race any more, there's enough time for the listener to digest and absorb the music. I certainly feel that nowadays, we're not given any time at all - we're expected to have an opinion on something immediately. I'm a very slow person I think, I need a lot of time to absorb something.

OTOMO: Maybe my answer is different from your question, but about Ground-Zero time...maybe the music of Ground-Zero had a lot of questions for the audience, but [the] answers [went] maybe only in this



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direction. [See diagram] But now my music - like I.S.O., or yesterday, is a question. Of course the audience decide [if] this music is a question, but I don't make answers. I mean the audience can decide anything from this music. Because Ground-Zero have a kind of focusing. Of course, the beginning of the Ground-Zero time, maybe I want to say something to the audience, but now - it's quite different. Maybe I'm also one of the audience on the stage...maybe! I've really enjoyed hearing Keith's sounds, Taku's sounds, my sounds.

EP: I'm sure that goes along with what AMM believe as well. It's kind of utopian, their goal, their dream, their mission - that the audience must be included in every improvisation.

OTOMO: Yes, I think yesterday's concert also - the audience was very important for us. If the audience didn't listen together, I'm sure our music [would be] quite different.

EP: So what you're saying is there's now more response, give and take...with Ground-Zero it was all just one way, everything coming from the band.

OTOMO: With Ground-Zero, even if the audience didn't like it, I can just insist [and make it louder], saying 'LISTEN! LISTEN!' Yesterday - totally different. Now I like my idea. Now I like myself. Maybe it's Manga comics helped me with this kind of idea, I don't know!

EP: Your first instrument - would it have been a tape recorder, or a guitar?

OTOMO: Yeh, yeh. Tape recorder. Also - it's not an instrument, but I could make a radio with tube when I was a teenager, with a cheap transistor. Also I made a very unusual, very primitive synthesiser, or very primitive organ, just to make like a [peeeee-ooooo-peeeee] ...

EP: An oscillator?

OTOMO: Yeh, yeh, an oscillator. I made it because I just listened to synthesiser stuff in the early 70s from pop stuff, rock stuff, and the sound for me - it was so strange! What's that instrument?! Then I tried to find what kind of instrument it was, and someone said it's a mini-moog. I called the instrument shop. But - unbelievably expensive! It's not possible to buy, [for] a junior high school student! So I said, OK, maybe the oscillator. So I make a very simple oscillator. [makes ooo-wooo-ooo-wooo sounds] I thought that was a synthesiser! A [real] synthesiser had a more complicated...but I just did it. Just for fun, to make something. I don't play with the sound, just make it. Also tape recorder, just make tape music, just for fun. I don't play for the stage. That was my first experience of the music. Then when I was high school student, I just start with school band - play rock and roll or blues or jazz - just for getting a girlfriend!

EP: I get the impression that there's a lot more music available in Japan than there is here. Or anywhere else in the Western world for that matter. Is that true?

OTOMO: Many, many CDs. It's almost impossible to hear everything. Especially a lot of reissued stuff from the 60s, not only avant-garde music - a lot of pop stuff, progressive rock...if you want to buy a CD, you can get ANYTHING. Anything at all.

EP: Did you see Derek Bailey when he came to Japan?

OTOMO: Yeh, I saw him in 1980 - with Milford Graves. It was fantastic - just fantastic concert. Milford Graves, and a Japanese dancer - Min Tanaka. Three days concert in Tokyo. And I went to it every day. Because I got free tickets! From kind of Japanese Time Out magazine. They said we give you five free tickets for the listener, so...it was really interesting for me. Very great concert. I'm just wondering if someone recorded this concert? Derek just played like- Derek Bailey! Milford just played like Milford!

EP: Have you met John Zorn?

OTOMO: John Zorn lives in Tokyo. I don't remember exactly, but from start of middle 80s. He lived in Tokyo. He have apartment in Tokyo. I

was just one of his fans, but of course it's really helpful for me [to meet him]. It was a very interesting scene in Tokyo, just before the 1990s. Lot of things happened, but no-one knows what. Just something! Before John Zorn, just noisy musicians play just noisy style; free jazz musicians play just free jazz style; contemporary musicians play just contemporary style...they're not against each other, only different. But John Zorn did a funny thing - he bring them from the different backgrounds [together], which never happened before John Zorn. That was very interesting. Sometimes [the results] completely didn't work! But I love this kind of adventure, this kind of experiment. Very challenging!

EP: Is it not so exciting now, in Japan, or is it just different?

OTOMO: Mmmm - just for me, just for my opinion, the end of the 1980s was just chaos, just before something happened, a lot of interesting things. Then 1990s - a lot of things start in Tokyo, and then came a lot of CDs. And that was OK. But after middle of 1990s, for me - everyone [was] just doing the same things. Of course, [there were] still great things. The quality was very good, but...always same persons like me, like The Ruins, like Keiji Haino. Of course, everyone did it great. Afterwards, Taku, or Sachiko, more younger musicians from the different rock - that [was] more exciting for me with quiet sounds! Some of them are completely against me, even! But I love them! Because I know the reason. I also sometimes am against my past! I love that!

EP: You mean musicians are going out of their way to deny Ground-Zero or noise music?

OTOMO: The Japanese do it with more kindness, not like strongly against.

EP: You seem to have been very hard-working on the international scene. A lot of appearances. How do you feel about the state of new music today? Does it look healthy to you? Has everything been done? Has experimental music got to the point where it can only appeal to the same people, it's not branching out to get a new audience?

OTOMO: It's quite difficult to judge for everything. Some of it is nice, some of it is not great. So it's difficult to say [if] this music scene is good or bad. For me, always something interesting seems to happen everywhere. Sometimes someone says new music has died or punk rock is died. Always someone says that rock is finished. Or jazz is finished. Always happening. But for me always something interesting happen everywhere. Just me personally, I'm always positive-thinking. I like - it's not new, but I like [the] idea of the Mego people. Very much! Also some Chicago young musicians. Jim O'Rourke of course already everyone knows, but not only Jim O'Rourke...but more younger musicians like T V Powell. Not famous. They also play electronics. Jim Baker - he's a quite older musician, he's a very nice piano player, also he play harps and things like that. It's great, really great. I think not famous, but just last year I went to Chicago and play with a lot of new musicians. And everyone has a very nice feeling. Like at yesterday's concert!



SACHIKO MATSUBARA



The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

Looking more like a warehouse than a pub the Fleece & Firkin is a dark and dingy sweatpit serving up pints of bilgewater in plastic pots. Inside was a mixed audience featuring hardly any of the usual specimens that haunt these events - the grey men in their late 20s with shoulder bags, Clark Kent glasses, shaved heads and a face loaded with chinless misery intended as a mask of artful, detached coolness. Impossible to be cool in here 'cos if the heat don't get ya then the sight of all these healthy young females, rigged out in regulation Gap Gestapo uniforms, surely will. But there's always one: the Fashion Victim, here because he'd read they were 'cool', the latest thing to be into for as long as the music press arbiters of taste deem it to be so. Was he hard to spot? No, because in a pub packed to the gusset with sweaty bodies there he was wearing an olive green snorkel parka zipped all the way up to the top with a 1977 footballer's perm looking like the latest post-*Trainspotting* incarnation of Doctor Who.

I'm sure he was confused how to feel about support band Fridge of whom not enough has been written in the press for a clear stance to be taken. Is it art or is it arse? Well, if three sullen looking 20 year-olds swapping instruments and slapping out car advert background music is 'art' then go right ahead but I know what I saw. Only on the final track did they show any signs of life when they decided 'Tonight Matthew, We're Going To Be Mogwai' and promptly built a sizeable wall of noise with bottom-string bass breezblocks and the kind of simplistic repeated chord progression that you could communicate to friendly aliens with. All very typical late 90s 'They Were Quite Good, Weren't They?' which, for me at least, is not enough. And just what sort of a band name is 'Fridge' anyway? Is it meant as some kind of distanced, nonchalant stance on band names altogether? Certainly the music they play wouldn't suit a moniker like 'Cannibal Babysitter' or 'Foetus Kebab' but where, where, fucking WHERE is any sign of commitment to their music? All that scowling behind your limited release EPs and blurred photos of fuck-all album covers says...NOTHING.

And on Planet Earth 1999 saying nothing just won't do - there's too many signals coming in, too much information, too much calling for our attention - shit, just too much of too much to try and hide in your minimalist decorated caves, fanning yourselves with empty CD cases while the insistent burn of modern culture scorches the cities dry, leaving the streets full of corpses blind with nostalgia for a time and place that never existed.

Someone has to be bold, to take the chance and step out of this ruined arena of wasted potential and decaying spirit and sweep up the ashes before lighting the way ahead. With every other artform reduced to bad parodies of former myths of imagined glories only music seems capable of stepping over the millennial chasm and embracing the chaos that is surely waiting for us on the other side. The situation takes on an almost Biblical imperative because we really DO need something to wash all this crap away - one giant cleansing wave that consumes everything we hate, everything we don't fucking need - mobile phones, billboards, water features, 'lifestyle' magazines, platform trainers, hanging baskets, lava lamps, Sunny Delight, discos - all flushed out of our lives and dumped on the ocean floor like the SHIT it is. But where will this trigger for the cataclysm come from? No good waiting for Yahweh, Buddha, Poseidon or Krishna or any of that crowd because they're all dead and gone. So it has to come from us. 'Way down Inside', one huge psychic lurch towards the shore we've all been trying to reach for...THOUSANDS of years now. And, as far as I'm concerned, leading the vanguard in this Reverso Canute Mission is Godspeed You Black Emperor!

Take note 'Fridge' and all you other wide-eyed hopefuls out there - if you want to catch the attention of the jaded masses then get yourselves a bloody good band name. The English language has almost run out of single words that will serve the purpose (though I still cling, with fading hope, to the prospect of 'Chafe' or 'Orifice' cropping up in the NME one week) so try using some fucking imagination. Reach for the bookshelf, steal a song title, consult a Ouija board or shake up some Scrabble letters in a bag and just see what happens! GYBE! showed MILES of style by taking their name from a Japanese biker gang and making it very much their own; without injecting it with any specific meaning, without ruining its load of very dark mystery that is so vital to their sound.

So, in the rising heat nine people fumbled about on the tiny stage, placing chairs, setting up drumkits and smoking. They looked like a random collection of street freaks - everything from the wild-eyes Catweazle of a drummer to the Cuban Revolutionary and the knot-topped *Big Issue* salesman - the kind of grizzled phantoms that lurk on every back street in every city in the world. The two girls who make up the string section are very much the flowers amongst the weeds, sporting flimsy white tops and smoking enough to create a dry ice cloud that Metallica would've been proud of. With their records they've always kept themselves at an enigmatic distance from the audience, upholding the fantasy that this music came from somewhere else, from the spaces in between. But now, here they are, in the flesh, real specimens and, guess what, they look just like you and me. They aren't 'stars', they aren't all dressed in black and putting on some tired poses because this is all about the music. Really, finally, once and for all, it's about the music.

It starts simply enough - the strings play 'The Dead Flag Blues' refreshingly loud enough to drown out the twats who like to ruin gigs by talking. They're soon joined by the three guitarists all working on the same chords, lifting the sound higher. A projector flickers into life and the word 'Hope' scratched out of a black background shudders against the back wall. It's almost note for note perfect with the record and the last predictable thing they do all night. The track is cut short when something on stage explodes, derailing the sonic train for five minutes or so. They restart with a new track that seems inspired by the wailing voice from the original *Star Trek* theme - but this isn't lazy referencing of popular culture, this is totally transcendental, rendering the crowd transfixed like hillbillies watching

UFOs as they ascend into the stratosphere. And that's pretty much where they stayed all night.

It's difficult to talk about their music without resorting to hyperbole and poetic indulgences so I'll try to be succinct: nine people, two of 'em drummers, really loud. An often painful wall of noise that loosened my vertebrae and pummelled my innards like a heavyweight champion. Flickering images of clown faces, ruined cityscapes and dogs rolling in the grass skimmed across the back wall. About 80% was new material with some surprising twists on the 'established' (in some minds) GYBE! 'formula'. Everything from sudden drop-ins (as opposed to achingly slow builds to crescendo) to almost Dub basslines to sustained salvos of dual drumming that could level a small Balkan

state. REALLY fucking loud. 'Tunes' (probably too simplistic a term for them but there honestly aren't the words) almost familiar and yet, somehow, never heard before. Without any lyrics to get in the way the transmission comes through clear and unadulterated but, like I said, no amount of verbs or nouns are going to be enough to convey the effect of this music. In the end it comes down to visual impressions, brainscreen flashes: Motorways at night / A tree on a hillside, bent by the wind / litter in the streets / Clint Eastwood riding into town in *A Few Dollars More* / American cars / Darth Vader / a sandstorm in the Gobi desert / a fire in a nightclub / the Hulk Vs the Thing / surf at midnight / dinosaur bones / an abandoned factory yard choked with weeds / Catherine Zeta Jones in a black thong, down on all fours, dripping with sweat / a Rothko painting / an iceberg / a tree struck by lightning / a black Ford Cortina Mk IV on fire / a giant skeleton in the sky made from clouds / the photos of the Black Dahlia's body / a beach covered with snow / a gutter flooded with rain / Auschwitz / Las Vegas / *Taxi Driver* / Diana's Funeral / The Death of Gwen Stacy / the view from the top of Grouse Mountain, Vancouver BC / Durer's Rhinoceros / oil in a puddle / HP Lovecraft / HR Giger / *Apocalypse Now*...

At the end of it all, when they finally shamle off stage, I'm left exhausted and exhilarated. More testing than any moshpit, this felt like an endurance test and a glimpse behind the veil of consensus reality, beyond the numbing spectacle of daily life, into an untarnished landscape where only the strong survive and Hope is just another name for home. Where the bone of an idea like a 'Rock Band' has been stripped of its meat and drained of its marrow and all we have left is faith that something beyond fashion and comfort blanket nostalgia could be a totem for us to cling to. That a simple union of string symphonics and guitar thunder could be enough to sum up thousands of years of human evolution. On the cusp of a Millennium's end that could mean everything or absolutely fuck-all we need GYBE! like we need oxygen and hamburgers. By taking their stadium wide sound and compressing it into a cramped pub they make it abundantly clear that nothing will change if we just stand together and march like automatons; the revolution is private or not at all. History repeats itself from Belfast to Beijing and like a wiser man then me once said: *Those Who Do Not Remember The Past Are Condemned To Repeat It*.

GYBE! have bust the clock and burnt the calendar. It's TIME to face the future with no limitations and no chicane.

RIK RAWLING 20 July 1999

GODSPEED YOU BLACK EMPEROR!

14 July 1999 at
the Fleece & Firkin, Bristol



The ReR Corner

The Science Group

A Mere Coincidence RER MEGACORP SCIENCE 1 CD (1999)

The continuing presence of Chris Cutler in so many areas of musical activity is something to be welcomed and treasured. As well as releasing his own music, and that of his extensive network of collaborators and associates, through his ReR label, he has remained a committed live and studio performer. Live, his drumming is a wonder to behold. No other performer plays the drumkit as he does, his arms weaving dynamically about his equipment in a virtuoso display of controlled aggression. Yet Cutler's primary impulse is towards self-effacement and collaboration, as is evidenced by countless group concerts and recordings. *A Mere Coincidence* is the most recent of these, and a particularly fine example. Cutler's aphoristic lyrics on aspects of scientific theory are given berserk settings by composer Stevan Tickmayer. The album is a succession of short, frenziedly inventive musical spasms, presided over by fierce guiding intelligence. Cutler's old mucker Fred Frith contributes wild guitar riffs, while Tickmayer weighs in with demented keyboard pounding. Cutler himself agitates powerfully on drums and electronics. Cutler's texts are sung by Amy Denio, whose ethereal voice swoops and glides around the group's formidably intense playing. Lurching shifts of sound and tempo create a confrontational, yet engrossing listening experience.

RICHARD REES JONES

Bob Drake Medallion Animal Carpet

RER MEGACORP CTA 7 CD (1999)

Another oddball recording from the estimable guitarist and producer Bob Drake. Mostly this release is dominated by storming, powerhouse tracks displaying Drake's twisted take on the history of rock guitar, his solo tour de force encompassing everything that's ever been played on that six-stringed beastie - from dysfunctional rockabilly to cornholing Country and Western riffs, via truly psychedelic mayhem of all stripes. In this he's proving more than a match for the great Eugene Chadbourne, assuming the role (like Mycroft to Sherlock Holmes) of his smarter

brother. In his music-assassination conspiracy he's joined by main ReR man Chris Cutler effortlessly contributing an excellent round of super-fast drumming, and occasional deputy sidemen Tim Gadd, Jason Dumars, Mark Fuller and Mark McCain who all stand to their guns. Drake's energised, breakneck pace on fretboard-stripping - which Cutler matches admirably - is matched only by his furious editing technique when he switches to producer-mode, and he delivers rush after rush of adrenalin-shock as the mismatched performances collide excitingly in real time. Dull linearity is sacrificed on the altar of exciting unknown chaos - virtually anything could happen. No wonder he's in demand as a producer in the States...

Further chaos results from the ingenious ploy of scrambling his own lyrics. To help him with this, Drake used a software programme called 'Spaghetti', a random sentence generator which can play around with your vocabulary. Its use might account for such pure Dada snippets as *'Deformed sewage squashed this insect / his kind toupee donated some worm / his snake accidentally rebuilt the / scary detrimental robot.'* I know how frustrated an artist can become at the limits of common sense - or at the limits of one's own abilities, or lack of them (it happens to me all the time, when drawing - often I can devise quite bizarre methods in an attempt to fool myself into achieving better work). Brian Eno's use of his Oblique Strategy cards probably works really well, if you obey the instructions imaginatively enough. And Robert Rauschenberg, still belting out amazing paintings in his latter years, continues to amaze himself. 'I tend to

be mistrustful of ideas,' is his counsel. 'Ideas are based on what you already know.'

With his unassailable guitar skills matched with his intense editing style, Drake has come close to equalling the power of the early Mothers of Invention records. However, Frank Zappa's aim (in the 1960s at any rate) in editing was to jolt listeners out of their security, and to juxtapose found recordings for maximum satirical effect - his method was a gun turned against the world. Drake, by contrast, succeeds mainly in revealing the weird shapes inside his mental landscape.

ED PINSENT

Peter Cusack Where is the Green Parrot?

RER MEGACORP PC1 CD (1999)

Peter Cusack is a well-known and well-established name in the London experimental music scene, not only for his recorded and performing achievements but also for the occasional evenings of electronic and electro-acoustic music he organises at The Spitz venue near Liverpool Street. Those who attend these events may even be lucky winners of a free CD in the raffles that he spontaneously organises, and he may even pour you a glass of Lucozade as he smiles at you from under his paper hat - all adding to the friendly, party atmosphere at these soirees.

The same atmosphere of cheerful informality transfers to portions of this CD. It chirps out a mixture of unrehearsed guitar playing segments, mixed with environmental recordings - so the guitar vies with ambient sounds recorded at night, a barking dog, and many bird calls, including seagulls and - inevitably - a green parrot. The guitar at one stage becomes a *Camberwick Green*-styled melody of stupefying banality, to be followed by the sound of a jet plane landing. For some reason this reminded me very much of Young Marble Giants and their 1981 tribute to Testcard music - and Cusack's CD starts to turn into a 1960s BBC travelogue from here on. We segue

into further untreated recordings, featuring Mr Cusack and his family during their holidays, or during a shopping trip. They make it abroad and we hear an ethnic stringed instrument plucking away, answering the earlier guitars. We also hear the unintentionally amusing remarks of this very middle class family and their smug observations about life - one of them is so PC he doesn't like the idea of 'caged animals'. Recalling the far better 'Belgium Barrage' by Adam Bohman, Cusack offers up a siren-blasting episode and also captures his stuffy remarks about 'how the grownups are dealing with everything' to his offspring. This record has a few scant moments of atmosphere, but it's no *Presque Rien* - in fact Cusack's ambitions soon start to look a bit stunted. As for the Parrot episode itself, where Cusack loops bird noises with his own voice trying to get the bird to speak, it's simply infuriating. Animals, children, foreign holidays and patronising remarks - you know, Cusack missed his calling. He should have been a *Blue Peter* presenter!

ED PINSENT

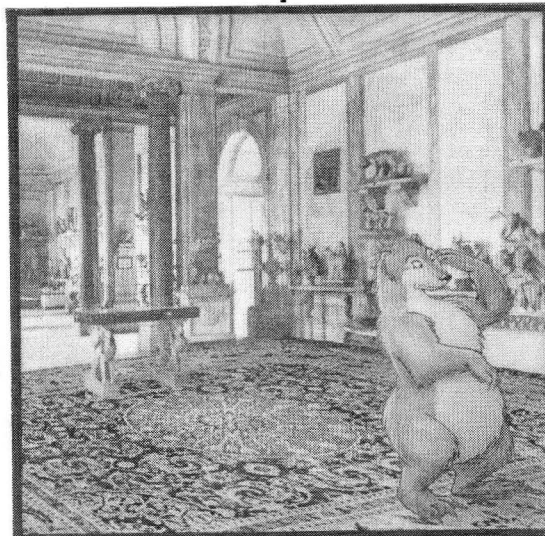
Chris Cutler and Thomas Dimuzio Quake

RER MEGACORP CCTD1 CD (1999)

Ah, now this is bloody excellent. One of the most robust and full-blooded noise projects that Cutler has been associated with in recent years, and it's an intoxicating, glorious onslaught...of cascading whirlpools in the night sky, no less. Two live recordings, from Maine and Massachusetts. Dimuzio immediately earned a place in my heart with his 1998 release *Headlock*, a solo turn on which he played no end of innumerable and unlikely-sounding pieces of junk ever admitted in the name of music-making. Here it seems he's letting Cutler handle most of the instrument hardware, although the drum kit and associated junk fragments are all electronically connected, and Dimuzio is constantly reprocessing everything - simultaneously wreaking his own cheerful mayhem with radios, CD players and samplers. It's like experiencing the full power of an electric storm, but not simply hearing it happen outside your window - you're right in the heart of this huge black raincloud, watching the elemental forces gather and blast out thunderbolts causing major havoc below. This is the kind of dark wine that'll really get your juices flowing, believe me. Cutler used to manage this kind of emancipated thundering on occasion when he really got down and dirty with Fred Frith in The Art Bears or Henry Cow - and they forgot all that cissy Art-Rock piffle. Since he clearly has the enviable facility to bash out musical noise of this quality in nothing flat, why the hell isn't there more of it in the world?

ED PINSENT

Rer Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road,
Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG



tape machines maken



Erik M

Frame

FRANCE, METAMKINE MKCD026 3" CD (1999)

This is a recent addition to the large collection of Cinéma pour L'Oreille mini-discs issued by Jérôme Noetinger's label out of France - none of which I actually own, but when you look at the impressive roster of names of the contributors to this unique series (Ferrari, Wehowsky, Marchetti, Günter, Chion, O'Rourke, Ruttman and many others) you have the feeling they have to be pretty intensely serious works. Jérôme Noetinger's personal mission is, I can claim (without hearing these records) to assemble together all modern artists who build and expand on the 'classic' musique concrète framework.

Erik M's contribution to the total effort is a very good one, and he actually built *Frames* up out of samples sourced from other CDs in the series. It's a brief but expertly managed suite. There is already so much music in the world it's nice to know there are people who are capable of recycling it effectively. The traces of sound remain as 'footprints', it says here, which is a nice idea...trace elements in the atmosphere, tiny shards of metal on the shelf working their way under your skin.

Erik M offers 4 short tracks over 18 minutes, intended to be put on shuffle-play in your CD device. It's very fragmented at first, with a randomised barrage of clicks and speedy noise whizzes, gurgles and electric clonks. Occasionally the collage might resolve itself into a semi-musical construct, deeply resonating tones along with guitar notes, heavily treated voices and a very deep sound - only to have this apparent solidity swept away, like an illusion in the wind.

Distortion, speed, intense dynamics and near-confrontational tactics are Erik M's tools. He's not interested, finally, in building up nor sustaining a musical mood, as many droners do - he's more intent in assembling as much sonic information as he can within a miniaturist frame. His sounds are resolutely abstract, but never foreboding. This is work that stems from a real artistic commitment to difference - not merely being weird, but setting an agenda of rejecting the familiar and striving hard to locate, generate and excite new noises all the time.

And there's a fragment of delicious birdsong on the fourth sector, so how can you lose? Peter Cusack could learn something from this one!

ED PINSENT

Metamkine, 50 Passage des Ateliers, 38140 Rives, France

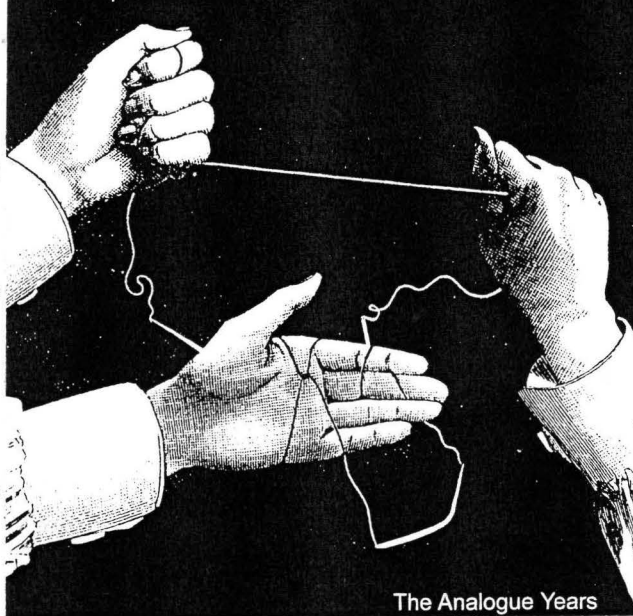
The Loop Orchestra

The Analogue Years

AUSTRALIA, ENDLESS RECORDINGS ER03 CD (1999)

Quite superb. Just because you or I have never heard of these obscure Australians in no way diminishes the importance or power of their work. Achieved with tremendous economy - just tape loops and reel to reel tape recorders - and a great deal of patience. A more refined listener may be put off by the apparent crudeness of the sound and technique, but actually this brutalist quality only enhances the listening experience - why, these people may have been the first punk-concretists! The lessons of Steve Reich and Nurse With Wound are combined in one place, and The Loop Orchestra deliver more than their share of weirdness. Going one better than formal, established electro-acoustic music, these players are not afraid of using rhythm and melody (the latter in very small doses however), and they give time to allow the loops to *speak*. Over time, these pieces expand into amazing dimensions as they slowly unspool, most noticeably on the two very effective pieces 'Outsiders and Outcasts' and 'Hypnotique'. The former makes a haunting use of chanting voices, a heavy bass drum, and church bells to end the suite. The latter is more chaotic, letting its demented cartoon voices sputter gibberish over mechanical wheezes, hisses and grunts, while increasingly wild and adventurous foreign sounds leap into the fray. The final track, 'Woolloomooloop' is a 24 minute epic (performed live, remarkably - as are all but two of the pieces here), making great use of street noise, traffic sounds, children screaming and distorted urban ambience to create a depressing townscape vision. OK, arguably some of this may appear like Industrial Music arriving some 20 years after it happened in the UK, but this particular vision is far less specific and directed than, say, the work of This Heat or Throbbing Gristle. For which open-endedness we must thank the seven members of The Loop Orchestra.

The Loop Orchestra



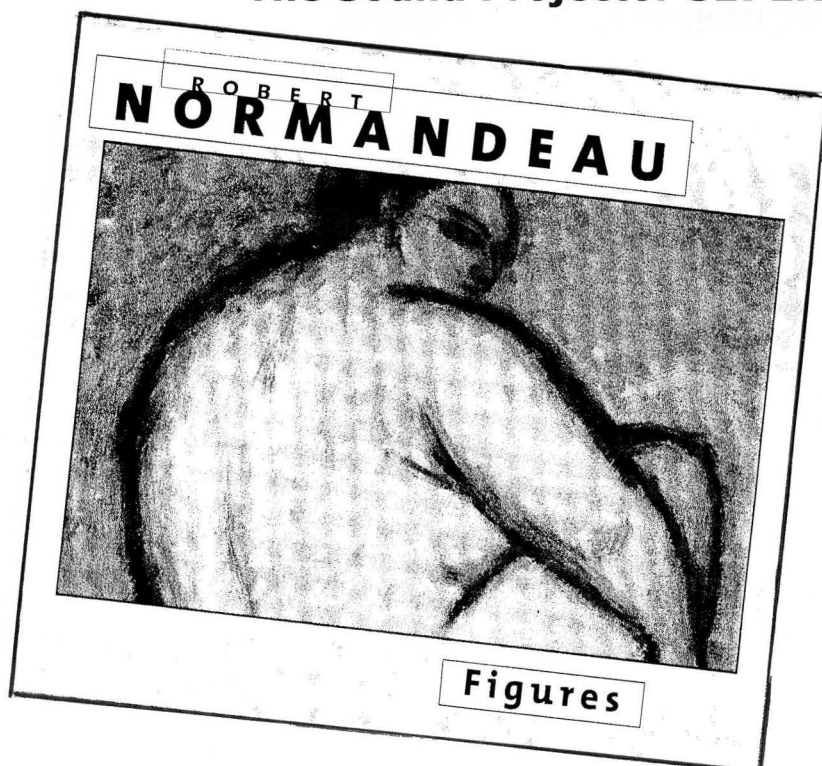
The Analogue Years

One of the 'main men' in the Orchestra, Peter Doyle, reports that the combo was formed in 1982 out of activities taking place on 2MBS-FM, an experimental FM radio station in Sydney, Australia. Some of the participants were 'using the radio studio as an instrument, experimenting with tape recorders and tape loops - cutting up, dissecting and repeating sounds.' From this, a decision was made to focus the activity - and put together 'something like an orchestra of machines. In this case it was reel-to-reel tape machines'. It was an exciting idea. Imagine an entire concert hall of up to forty players, equipped with old fashioned tape

recorders. Each would be using tape loops to take the place of a conventional orchestral part - one loop for percussion, one for strings, one for brass. John Cage would have surely approved - if he hadn't been so anti-orchestras! Unfortunately, this grandiose idea has not yet been realised - and more's the pity. Instead, the five core members of The Loop Orchestra found themselves rehearsing a 'smaller scale study of pure sound'. Besides this CD, they made a vinyl record *Suspense* in limited quantities in 1991, and have performed at art galleries and concerts. A future planned release called *Demise* will be built around the readings of Anthony Mannix, an Art Brut painter whose work has appeared in *Raw Vision* magazine.

ED PINSENT

Endless Recordings, PO Box 693, Newtown, NSW 2042, Australia



Robert Normandeau

Figures

CANADA, EMPREINTES DIGITALES
IMED9944 CD (1999)

Daniel Leduc

Le Voyage d'hiver

CANADA, EMPREINTES DIGITALES
IMED9945 CD (1999)

Two CDs' worth of good contemporary electroacoustic music here. Both composers are among many French-Canadian composers (of whom Frances Dhomont is near the forefront) making a pretty good living from this artform, which is almost ironic when you consider that at one stage musique concrète was considered too radical and challenging for any sort of public consumption. Like American novelists who live as writers in residence at big Universities, they have found a career thanks to top-level support from large academic organisations, arts councils, and corporate-sponsored competitions. Normandeau, for example, brought together other French-speaking composers and helped found the Canadian Electroacoustic Community in 1987 - of which Leduc has served as President. Both have won lots of awards in Europe, and received commissions from assorted contemporary arts centres in Canada. I think this label got started in the early 1990s...Chris Cutler was saying 'if the first few releases are symptomatic, [Empreintes Digitales] will be a valuable resource if it expands'. *Lieux Inouïs* - Unheard Of Places - was among the first releases, an Acousmatic record from Robert Normandeau.

His new one, *Figures*, has lots to recommend it, right from the opening onslaught of multi-layered laughter recordings which are immediately transformed from human voices into a babbling brook of mocking scorn. But there are also longeurs. Sometimes it shows how the adventurous spirit of early musique concrète has all but vanished now, to be

replaced by this soft-centred, easily-assimilated, user-friendly 'modernism'. It would be wrong to blame Normandeau and his ilk for this, but *Figures* is one symptom of the inevitable process of descent into acceptability. *Figures* sounds somehow glib and facile, probably made using very expensive digital equipment, producing results that - rather than express the composer's vision - tend more to keep directors of contemporary arts centres happy, in the knowledge that they're supporting the avant-garde.

Normandeau's sleeve notes reinforce the salon atmosphere, particularly on the 19-minute 'Venture', a 1998 work composed exclusively of samples from his progressive rock LP collection. Lord help us. In his notes, he keeps a straight face as he endorses Emerson Lake and Palmer, and in the music he inserts quotes from The Beatles - including (another irony) from John Lennon's 1968 attempt at musique concrète, 'Revolution 9'. The Residents produced a far more effective demolition-job collage from Beatles records in the 1970s, occupied one-quarter of the time, and did it with a savagely sardonic sense of humour too.

Leduc's *Voyage* is pretty good. The off-putting factor for many prospective listeners will be the solemn intoning German voice - probably having the same effect on those countless millions of Pierre Henry fans whose faces dropped when they first heard his *Apocalypse de Jean*, one of his classic 'electronic oratorios', a ghastly combination of electronic noises with echoed voices which I'm sure I need hardly describe in further detail. However, Leduc does turn

in some nice modified sound effects like rain falling (always a popular one with me, at any rate), trains passing by, and the electronic tones of phones ringing - with large slabs of added echo. The work intends, I assume, to evoke the frosty emotions and sensations of a hard Winter voyage, like perhaps Napoleon's retreat from Moscow (if he'd taken the train instead of riding on horseback). Despite moments of occasional stiffness *Voyage D'hiver* registers some partial success in this - but the composer may have kept his own heart in the fridge for a bit too long.

ED PINSENT

Ákos Rózzmann

Impulsi. De två, med tre instrument

SWEDEN, FYLKINGEN RECORDS FYCD 1013 CD (1999)

Rózzmann is a Budapest-born composer who's spent much of his career in Stockholm. I was encouraged to learn he's the organist at the Catholic cathedral there, and hoped for some soul-stirring apocalyptic trumpet blasts from this CD. But this tape composition, sourced from instruments such as piano, zither, and organ - and mixed with human voices - is disappointing. Rózzmann achieves some halfway decent moments of dark, melancholy insane-asylum keenings now and again, but overall this is another example of mediocre contemporary composition. The over-long 23 minute track ruined it for me, with its endless loopings of self-important sounding voices pronouncing their meaningless syllables as though they were reading from Herman Hesse. With laughably pretentious sleeve notes by Hans-Gunnar Peterson: 'Those who compose instrumental and vocal music according to historic paradigms are doomed to create art without originality or a nucleus of creative like-force', he bumbles.

ED PINSENT

Box 170 44, SE-104 62, Stockholm, Sweden

Dedalus

Pezzi Inediti 75-76 & Materiali per Tre Esecutori e Nastro Magnetico

ITALY, ELICA UPP-3220 CD (1999)

You or I may never have heard of Dedalus until now, but as careers go in the world of avant-garde music they had a pretty good innings in the 1970s in Europe. This CD is their second LP in toto, preceded by a bunch of unissued tapes recorded a bit later that would have been their third LP. You could yearn for the grand years of the 1970s when rock stars had intellectual leanings and high-minded ambitions! Dedalus dreamed of edifying their public, only to be told by one record company in Torino they were far too elite - 'your music is on the seventh floor and the audience is on the ground floor...you should go down a few floors at least'. They came from backgrounds of jazz and contemporary classical, and tried their utmost to combine the two in their unique music, citing such influences as jazz-rock combos Soft Machine, Nucleus and Miles Davis; Stockhausen and Webern from the classical

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avant-garde; Adorno and James Joyce from literature, and more besides - including Jean-Luc Godard, and Albert Einstein. It seems like a vanished world compared to today, when so many rock bands are intellectually undernourished, their paltry ambitions mostly centred on corporate sponsorship, stadium sell-outs and T-shirt deals, and shamelessly copying others - in fact, copying not the music of their contemporaries, but (through dress and pop video) merely the superficial trappings of each others' images. I shrivelled with distaste recently to see Steps posing in an expensive and self-indulgent photo shoot where (for no reason whatsoever) they emulated the dress and makeup of Gene Simmons from Kiss, and Britney Spears.

The first eponymous LP of Dedalus was originally issued in late 1973 on the Trident label in Milan, following their great success at an avant-garde music festival in Naples. The LP apparently received heavy airplay on Italian radio (hard to credit, really). They played concerts in Italy and later in France, including an early form of 'benefit' concert in 1974 - long before Rock Against Racism or Live Aid - except this one was campaigning in favour of a divorce referendum. The second LP *Materiale...* was released in 1975, and showed work led into new challenging areas mainly under the watchful eye of Fiorenzo Bonansone, the cellist and pianist who also introduced electronic music elements to the mélange of noise and improv, and ended up composing most of the LP. What stands out in this remarkable record is the utter assurance with which Dedalus proceeded to assemble their challenging and unapproachable music. Using jazz instruments like the Fender Rhodes electric piano and saxophone, traditional ones like the accordion, and splicing everything together with insane tape edits and absurdist bursts of electronic composition, they delivered a set of astoundingly coherent statements that withstand scrutiny today. Even British Art rock of the same period - Henry Cow is our nearest equivalent - might sound a tad hesitant besides such confidence, and certainly less extreme. And Dedalus partially succeeded in bringing this music to a wider audience (the second LP sold in the thousands, not the hundreds), perhaps not on the same scale as Soft Machine and King Crimson, but it's a track record anyone could be proud of. I suppose their image may have been a partial stumbling block to success. The four photographs of the band inside the wrapper should have you muttering 'Open University maths module four' in about two seconds flat.

This CD has been put together following the revival of Dedalus in the 1990s. They tried live concerts in Italy in the mid 1990s, allowing various other like-minded musicians to join in, and managed a final LP *Pia Visione* as a private pressing. This CD is another revelation and another triumph from Andrea Cernotto and friends, who are also behind the excellent Nepless label.

ED PINSNT

Oren Ambarchi Insulation

TOUCH T33.16 CD (2000)

An excellent solo work from this Sydney-based musician, this one with a domestic release, following closely on the heels of his solo record *Stacte*, which he released as a vinyl LP on his

own Jerker Productions label last year. Another guitar record this, but much more fully realised and coherent as a work of art. 11 segments of guitar tape-work are presented together as pretty much a single suite. This music is not noise and it's not feedback! If anything it is modern electro-acoustic treatments, of sounds whose origin happens to be a guitar - a guitar in the hands of a gifted player, no doubt, but here we've got something as far removed from any kind of conventional guitar 'playing' as you could wish for. With the possible exception of the more recent work of Robert Fripp, who has extensively treated his solos with two Revox tape recorders in a live setting for his Soundscape series.

Realising three of these tracks with the aid of Matthew Thomas, Oren is in fact 'playing' his amplifier, his filters, his echo unit and studio (especially the overdub facility) as much as his 'axe'. Steadfastly refusing any normal or recognisable or familiar sounds, Oren arranges a series of non-specific bass throbs, underwater squelches, clacks and echoes, and spaceship motor whines within a sort of vague, rhythmical pattern. Effective it emphatically is - very quickly, you'll find yourself immersed in this astonishing world and lost within a land of wonder and mystery. Skip to track five, 'Simon', if your desire is to hear a masterful nod of the trilby to Pierre Schaeffer, for here we have what I think must be backwards tapes and that haunting muted *klang* that evokes an old grandfather clock chime. Or the eight track, called simply 'Study No 3', if all-out mayhem is your bag - this one is a constantly fragmenting kaleidoscope featuring collage and layers in a hyperactive whirl. Elsewhere, the more solid 'throbby' tracks might suggest a stripped down form of Techno to true lovers of the genre.

This issue lends itself well to the Jon Wozencroft packaging which is such a distinctive feature of the Touch series. He's gone for a blue-and-turquoise key, fitting for this very contemporary Blues record, for that's what it is - there is true emotion here, and it's melancholy in tone. The final track 'L'eclisse' is dedicated to the artist's father, and it's an achingly poignant valediction.

ED PINSNT



Ralf Wehowsky / Lionel Marchetti

Vier Vorspiele / L'Oeil retourné

GERMANY, SELEKTION SCD 026 CD (1998)

Very beautiful this. It's a sublime 24 minute piece of electro-acoustic composition by Marchetti, preceded by an equally sublime 'version' of same as interpreted by Wehowsky. Ralf Wehowsky is the main guy behind the RLW five CD set, reviewed elsewhere, and whose credentials as a major player in the modern sound-art stakes are fast becoming hard to ignore. In his 17-minute take on Marchetti's 'statement', he added voices by Dorothea Conradi and quotes from one of his own earlier releases, *Moraine's Eyes* - then boiled the whole effusion together in his kitchen, in a large copper cauldron. What strikes you in both these works - though especially in RLW's - is the sheer depth and intensity of their listening skills. Work of this grandeur only comes about, I suspect, through hours of sheer meditational listening, clearing the mind of clutter and examining these microscopic textures and miniature landscapes utilising the intense staring eye-beams of the ear. That is preparatory groundwork. The actual time spent on the execution - or even the methods used - could be relatively insignificant, compared to the time set aside for preparation. It's like the perfection required in the stages of an Alchemical operation.

The utter deliberation in the choice of sounds and their sequencing is evident - no careless rag-bag of 'anything goes' collision-editing here. Thus, a series of dramatic and striking dynamics result within these miniaturist works, even if there are vast emptinesses of silence which are treated as music also, and even if some of the sounds are so imperceptible they can only be noticed when they cease! For example, there's a compelling muffled and spectral drumbeat somewhere lurking underneath a range of top-strata noises that could be coming from the next room - or from another dimension, because it's simply bewitching. If I'm starting to become philosophical, it's the wisdom of the musical teachers speaking through this disc, and no wisdom of my own, believe me.

The second and equally appealing facet to be cherished in this sublime work is the unearthly dreaminess of it - dream-like transcendent sounds that are only usually found in the sweetest dreams and fade in an instant as you reluctantly awake to face the dawn - this CD comes close to evoking such moments, and does it with the gentlest of touches, akin perhaps to the cinema of ultra-obscure UK avant-garde film-maker David Larkin or the slightly more well-known visual artist/boxmaker Joseph Cornell. High praise indeed but more than fully justified when faced with such ethereal and resplendent music making of this magnitude.

The Marchetti piece - which to complete the symmetry of the work contains some RLW samples in the mix - was composed in Lyon in 1995 and 1997, and includes 'citations-collages' from, among other things, Bruno and Lionel taking a walk in the mountains and 'diverse radiophonic accidents'. Apart from human voices and radio voices, the majority of the sources and quotes actually remain unrecognisable and untraceable, yet they bear little evidence of much processing or intervention from the creators. Art conceals art. A couple of grand masters of the form at work.

ED PINSNT

Various Artists

MM

WORLD SERPENT WSCD025 CD
(1999)

The title is not, as one might suspect, an abbreviation of 'mmmm... listening to this album has really cheered me up, I think I'll pop down to the shops for some crisps and a lolly'. No. It's 2,000 in Roman numerals and this is a compilation commemorating the Millennium sent to loyal World Serpent fans. And I got one too. All your favourites are here. Algiz, Backworld, Darkwood, and of course, the one and only Dawn & Dusk Entwined, fresh from a stint as house band on Bruce's *Play Your Cards Right*... and yes, I know sarcasm is said to be the lowest form of wit. Well. There's nothing that actually stinks here, but I'm using the definition of stinks which is applied when no-one in the whole world could possibly approve. I'm sure there's folks somewhere, possibly wearing black clothes, who all but soiled themselves with excitement when this dropped through the letter box bringing EXCLUSIVE tracks by Pantaleimon and Bryin Dall. To be fair, Der Blutarsch, Cyclobe, Leutha, and Tor Lundvall turn in half-decent numbers distinguished by the fact that they fail to merge into the amorphous fog that is the rest of the album. The amorphous fog in question can be broken down into a series of vaguely folky, pseudo mediaeval acoustic gothic numbers. It's all beautifully recorded - plucked acoustic guitar and resonant cellos captured with crystal clarity, kettle drums reverberating around the halls of Valhalla - but y' know, how many more of these miserable fuckers do we need? They're not making great art, at least not any great art that hasn't already been done much better, and probably by someone else on World Serpent. They're not helping anyone. As P.J. O'Rourke observed, nothing was ever solved by being serious about it, and even Boyd Rice likes a laugh - every now and then. I mean - I ask you - one group here is called The Soil Bleeds Black. Well, I'll bet they go down a storm at the British Legion on Thursdays sandwiched between Stan Presley's Glitterdust All-Stars and The Amazing Rita. The day I let a group called The Soil Bleeds Black into my record collection is the day I take my pasty white ass to a rap gig in a Vanilla Ice T-Shirt and stand at the bar dining on crisps and pop, exclaiming 'what a spiffingly wizard natural sense of rhythm you chaps have.'

So, not quite full marks then. If you enjoy nothing better than wearing black clothes, fanning about with runes, and taking yourself extremely seriously then I can recommend nothing more highly than taking yourself down to the local army recruitment office and signing yourself up. Failing that, you've probably already got this compilation, or something else that's virtually identical, so nothing I could say is likely to knock any sense into you. Myself, I'm off to cleanse myself of this experience with the collected works of Snoop Dogg.

WAR ARROW

monolithic
invocations of
□□□□ existential
discomfort □□□□

Muslingauze this ain't. However, this red vinyl pressing with a decorative label and fiery red and black sleeve is very rich in atmospherics, and contains more actual real instrument-playing than any ambient / electronic record that claims the same richness. Plus there's the highly unusual instrumentation, including trombone, flute, tapes, guitars, 'squawkbox', and unidentified secret trademark devices known only as 'Things'. The power of exotic suggestion, to be sure.

The first side, comprising three segued tracks is beaten hands down by the side-long very dynamic B-Side, called simply 'Flight of Re', and it gets my vote because the sound is treated with strange electronic effects and achieves that elusive feeling of music that's somehow very hard to place - you don't know where it's coming from, how long it lasts, or who is playing it. That, to me, is a pretty desirable and admirable achievement, because it subverts the idea of common sense and linear causality that rules the lives of most of us, if we allow the anti-imagination forces to have their way. In the final analysis though, Voice Of Eye strike me as just a tad too solemn and self-important to merit repeated listening. This is music made by real hard-core anchorites, the St Bertha and St Joseph of the Oil Drum! They exhibit a certain indifference to the audience, which can sometimes betoken a high-minded dedication to one's muse - but here it seems more like petulant arrogance.

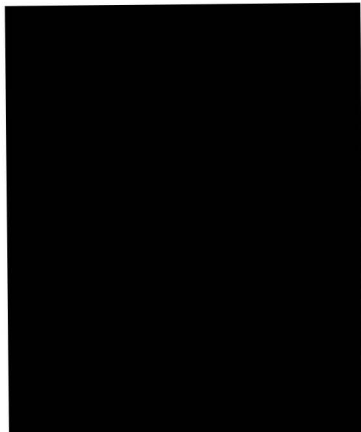
ED PINSENT

Voice Of Eye

Live

USA, ANOMALOUS RECORDS DV940604, VINYL LP (1995)

Very curious, pseudo-ethnic sounding record taken from rare live performances (in 1994, in SF and LA) by Bonnie McNairn and Jim Wilson, the singular duo collectively forming Voice Of Eye. At best, it's an off-centred bit of meandering Shanai solos, enriched by bizarre tonal and electronic backdrops, wailing away against light and lilting drumbeat loops suggestive of a three-legged camel ridden by the duo on their first trip abroad, while Richard Bishop is leading the caravan. At worst, what this record resembles is third-rate soundtrack music from a straight-to-video thriller set in the Middle East. No,



□□□□

C4I

Copenacre

NETHERLANDS, STAALPLAAT
STCD 142 CD (1999)

Not good - it pains me to state that this turned out to be a real stinkeroonie. Those guilty are a trio of UK players, who should have known better, collaborating for the first time and brought together by their presence together at one of the ubiquitous modern music festivals that are over-running the planet. *Copenacre* is a pallid, indifferent set of electronic noises, with many a yawn-worthy cliché drawn from the worlds of ambient and industrial - you want noises like steel gates clanging, noises like evil factories working into the night, noises like icy winds blowing across a bleak landscape, noises like sheets of glass breaking, and bursts of static electricity? Here they all are in a one-stop shopping mall of sound...every one of 'em calculated to press the 'alienation' button in the mind of an indiscriminate listener.

Another pretentious statement on the 'interface' between electronic music and modern warfare methods, and the dull droning throbs here are starting to make that concept look a little old hat. The incredibly crass sleeve art - a skull surrounded by international danger symbols and a stupid slogan which reads 'Command, Control, Communications, Computing and Intelligence' - does not help one bit, reducing that whole area of research to another, rather silly cliché. And to my great amazement, I learn that Joe Banks - foremost in serious academic study of this area - is associated with this misbegotten thing. The other two members of C4I are John Everall, who's produced many a nondescript electric non-event in his Tactile guise; and the lumpen Ashley Davies, whose CV is, let's be frank, nothing much to be proud of - Project D.A.R.K., Headbutt and Chemical Plant, not names firmly associated with great quality control in their voluminous output. I think the three met up at Stockholm in 1998 at a music festival and, with a large cheque from Staalplaat waved under their noses, decided this collab might be a good idea. It ain't. Stick with Disinformation records, dear listener, and pretend this abortion never existed.

ED PINSENT

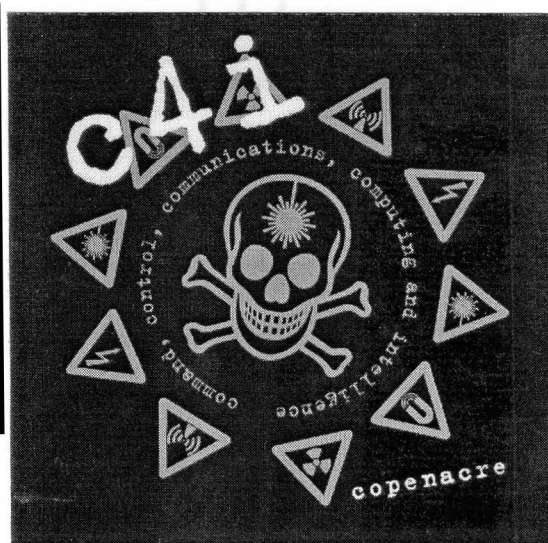
□□□□

Current 93

I Have A Special Plan For This World

DURTROWORLD SERPENT
DURTRO 048CD CD (2000)

I have to confess, I've never quite been down with Current 93. *Nature Unveiled* impressed me; it must surely remain one of the most relentlessly malignant records ever made. 'Summer Of Love' is a fantastic song, although of course it was actually an old Blue Öyster Cult number. *Death In June's* finest work seems to have come from



the period when David Tibet was a member. And let's not forget that Current 93 have given some excellent live performances, allowing David Tibet's 'malevolent panto' persona full reign in taking over an entire venue. Apart from these, what little recorded work I've heard always seems to take the form of acoustic whimsy with Tibet singing in a manner suspiciously reminiscent of the vocalisations of the occupants of Bagpuss's mouse organ. One minute you're bracing yourself for what bizarre intimations might unfold from an album entitled *Swastikas For Noddy*. Next your head is flooded with unrequested visuals of animated toy mice trying to shift a frying pan to a squeaky chorus of 'Heave! Heave! Heave!' David Tibet has always come across as an original thinker with some fine ideas, but for me at least, his vision, whatever it may be, seems notoriously elusive when it comes to pinning it

down in a studio.

I Have A Special Plan For This World shows that either I've not been paying attention properly, or by the Lord Harry, the boy's cracked it! The album consists of a single lengthy piece of music, based around a slowly repeating keyboard line swimming around in a dense soup of effects. Tibet delivers a lengthy monologue falling somewhere between symbolist poetry and apocalyptic dementia. I often suspect he's been born into the wrong age and would've been more at home living a hundred years ago. David Tibet makes more sense as a contemporary of Aubrey Beardsley, Richard Dadd or Odilon Redon, than Madonna, Damien Hirst and Timmy Mallet. Nothing here dispels this conviction. To be frank, I haven't got a fucking clue what he's talking about, but it doesn't seem to matter, the cumulative effect of the words and music is quite intense enough as it is thank you very much. Steve Stapleton makes his presence felt. There is a strong suggestion that Stapleton logistics inform much of what's going on; the jarring juxtaposition of studio and portable cassette machine as recording media; the digitised butchery of Tibet's voice that creeps in at the end; the way the whole thing doesn't follow familiar rules of composition.

I Have A Special Plan For This World sounds like how I'd always hoped Current 93 would. Darkly intelligent and rich in unsettling imagery used in making some esoteric point, rather than just for the sake of putting the wind up a few easily flustered Sunday school teachers. There's a lot of groups messing about with vaguely arcane imagery seemingly just so that black-clothed misery-obsessed teenagers can have something to spend their pocket money on. Happily, Current 93 have nothing to do with their ilk, as is evident from this powerful and convincing statement. Mr, Tibet, I raise my hat in your general direction.

WAR ARROW

Current 93

All Dolled Up Like Christ

DURTRO NO NUMBER 2 X CD

(1999)

Death In June

"Heilige!"

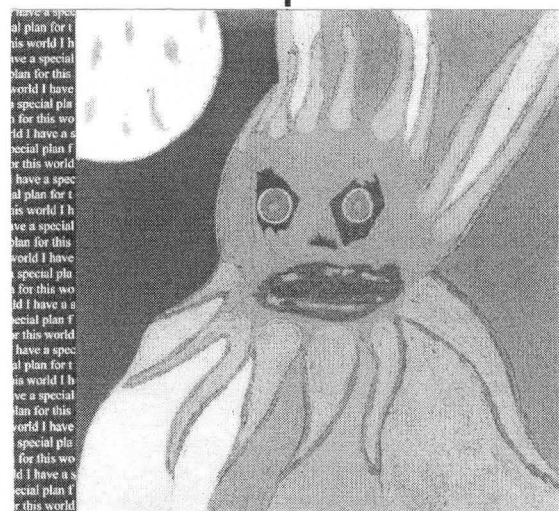
NER NEROZ 43 CD (1999)

Der Blutharsch

Gold Gab Ich Für Eisen

WKN 7 CD/VIDEO, (1999)

Live performances by these heavyweights of the World Serpent roster are frustratingly rare these days, in the UK at least, so the appearance of this batch of concert documents is to be welcomed. However, they are a decidedly uneven bunch, with two of them raising some distinctly unwelcome questions, as we shall see.



The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

The Current 93 double CD was recorded at two concerts in New York in 1996, and sees an extended line-up of the group perform many songs from the back catalogue, including some rarely heard live. These concerts were clearly major events; the performances are lyrical and passionate, and the audiences respond with unbridled enthusiasm.

It's strange how such simple songs can express so much. 'The Blue Gates of Death' consists of nothing more than a voice, a simple strummed guitar figure and 'la-la' backing vocals, yet it evokes unfathomable depths of anguish and sorrow. Elsewhere, restrained touches of violin and woodwind add colour and heighten the elegiac tone. A triad of nocturnes from the bleak *Of Ruine Or Some Blazing Starre* album is followed on the first disc by the exquisitely lilting 'A Sadness Song', and on the second by the manic pirouette of 'Oh Coal Black Smith'.

Central to all of this is David Tibet's remarkable voice, in which he delivers his mystical texts in tones ranging from the purest caress to the most fevered howl: an insidious, discomfiting encroachment.

Tibet's one-time ally Douglas P. has released *"Heilige!"*, his first peek over the parapet since being expelled from World Serpent. The military metaphor is appropriate, since Death in June seem to be abandoning their formerly ambivalent aesthetic in favour of an ever less equivocal stance. Unusually, Pearce appears unmasked on the front cover, sporting a soldier's helmet and brandishing a wineglass engraved with the Totenkopf symbol. The inside picture has him wearing a gasmask and holding the wineglass waggishly aloft, toasting the album's dedicatees: 'to all those who fight in isolation'. It's an empty slogan and a faintly ridiculous image, far removed from the seductive anonymity of earlier DJI cover art.

A statement posted on the World Serpent website gave their side of the story: that the split was mostly over business conflicts, but that 'there were also personal reasons, including political reasons'. The exact nature of these reasons is likely to remain a mystery – although Pearce's ever closer links with Albin Julius, of whom more later, may provide a clue – but World Serpent could with equal justification have cited musical reasons. *"Heilige!"* (available from BM June, London WC1N 3XX), a recording of a concert in Melbourne last year, is sadly lacking in imagination and creativity. Pearce and his cohorts (Albin Julius and John Murphy) appear content to trot out perfunctory readings of acoustic-based material, with barely a pause as one indifferently delivered ballad follows another.

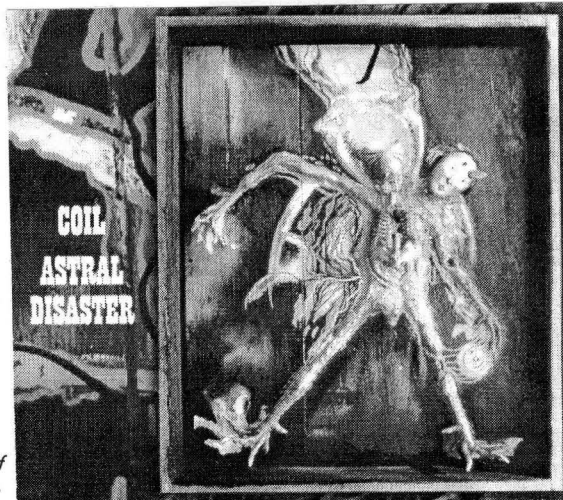
The noisier, more martial pieces fare somewhat better. The massed percussive attack is still impressive, and the sound samples rich and evocative; but they are interspersed with insipid orchestral flourishes and Pearce's doggedly artless phrasing. As the inevitable, over-familiar and quite possibly offensive 'C'est Un Rêve' closes proceedings, the overall impression is one of stagnation and routine.

One band that has not yet been expelled from World Serpent is Der Blutharsch, and on the evidence of this release it's difficult to understand why. *Gold Gab Ich Für Eisen* is a fairly lavish CD/video box set, again recorded live, that does nothing to allay the suspicion that Mr Julius and his mates are apologists for the far right. The artwork depicts a soldier gazing heroically into the distance, his shield bearing a flash that owes more to the SS than to Throbbing Gristle.

The music itself is an efficient mix of keyboards, tapes and martial percussion, which acts as the bedrock for some highly dubious vocalising. 'Honour and Pride' is a typical example, and you know that when the call of 'God Punish England' goes up they're not just out for revenge over the 1966 World Cup Final. The video, meanwhile, ends with the ignorant and offensive cry of 'Free Pinochet'.

I understand that Mr Julius is Austrian, and therefore likely to be pleased with recent political developments in that country. Like many of his fellow citizens, he seems to believe that the problems of the present can be solved by reverting to a murderous and thoroughly discredited ideology of the past. This belief is not only wrong, it is also ignoble and dangerous.

RICHARD REES JONES



Coil

Astral Disaster

THRESHOLD HOUSE/WORLD SERPENT LOCI CD14 CD (2000)

My initial experience of this was not entirely favourable. I notice on the cover, amongst the lists of instruments ascribed to certain members of the group, are finger symbols, thoughtforms, and obsidian mirrors. I'm prepared to make exceptions – like on that *Headbutt* album, where Elvina Flower is credited as playing floor tom, snare, boys, sweets, and puppies – but humour aside, it really gets on my tits to read a record cover and discover that the instrumentation stretches to period indication, smoke chamber and entropic verisimilitude. So, did you use a banjo or what, you pretentious arseholes!? Whether I'm

underestimating Coil or not, I couldn't help but raise a sceptical eyebrow at the mention of obsidian mirrors as some creative tool. Would this be of the kind, commonly referred to in the original Nahuatl as *tezcatli*, favoured by cultures of pre-Hispanic Mexico, I wondered. Would this be the polished volcanic glass mirror which gives its name to the Gods *Tezcatlipoca*, *Tezcatlanextia*, *Tezcatzoncatl* and of course the Goddess *Tezcatocayopechtli*? I wondered, the implement commonly held to represent the surface of the Earth, and believed to serve as a conduit to the more substantial realms of the Gods, of which noumenal reality is but a pale reflection? Or was it just something you saw in your Hamlyn's *Bumper Book of Mythology* that sounded cool? Begrudgingly I listened to the CD right up until the line about 'Egyptian Aztecs from Norway' whereupon I gave up and, resisting the impulse to hurl the disc across the room, retired to the lounge in order to catch up on the latest developments in Brookside Close. Aztecs! Aztecs! Fucking Aztecs! They weren't called Aztecs, UNLESS of course you're specifically referring to the ancestral migrant group who changed their tribal appellation to Mexitin upon leaving Aztlan, their island home suspected to have been somewhere in the region of Nayarit in Western Mexico. I know I shouldn't be such a pompous arse, but this general attitude of World Mythology as a homogenous melting pot of source material for the use of pop stars on occasions when they want to sound a bit mysterious, is often insulting and condescending to the originating cultures to the extent that I curse the draconian laws of this country that frown upon the dispensation of street justice with fire arms.

Anyway, after a particularly gripping episode of my preferred soap, during which Baby Spice lookalike Emily revealed her devious plans to break into the Farnham's house, much to the discomfort of the noble Tinhead, I returned to *Astral Disaster* in a calmer frame of mind. And damn it – it's pretty flawless as far as the music is concerned. Coil have been known to fall on their arses at times, but when it comes to this sort of layered drifting psychological stuff, it's difficult to find fault with them. These cathedrals of sound seem to stretch out into infinity that moment of realisation that every Lovecraft character experiences when it becomes evident that the shapeless tentacled abomination in the cellar was once Mr Thompson from the pie shop. It's an atmosphere which at once manages to be cloying AND spacious to agoraphobic degrees by virtue of Coil's considerable skill at creating a sense of drama without resorting to the obvious strategies. Their dark tableau is presented in a manner made all the more impressive by its lack of blokes running around in devil costumes quoting *Venom* records at each other. 'The Mothership & The Fatherland' is in particular a monolithic invocation of existential discomfort, with the slow drum beats echoing away in such vividly recorded detail that you forget you're listening to a CD. Even 'The Sea Priestess' impresses with its epic gothic choir and politely delivered surrealist monologue, so much so that I can forgive the bollocks about 'Egyptian Aztecs'. After all, the tale in question is, I would imagine, intended to reproduce the skewed logic of the subconscious, if the mention of a Tibetan coastline is an indication, so I suppose in getting irate, I'm only making myself look stupid. That's me told. Of its kind, *Astral Disaster* is perhaps not so potent as the Current 93 disc reviewed elsewhere, but it has its moments, and no doubt I will be playing it again.

WAR ARROW



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AKIRA IFUKUBE

By Andy Martin

AKIRA IFUKUBE WAS BORN IN 1914 AND educated in Hokkaido on the high plain of Shiyaanruru where he encountered and became fascinated by Ainu folk music. He studied forestry at the Imperial Hokkaido University and was initially self-taught as a composer.

His first work to achieve national recognition was *Japanese Rhapsody* of 1937, which won the Teheraprin Prize. During the war he worked as a scientific advisor on the study of the vibrational strength and elasticity of wood, but due to illness that resulted from his exposure to radiation in certain experiments he had to resign from forestry. From 1946 to 1953 he taught orchestration at the Tokyo National University for Music and Fine Arts (Geidai). In 1974 he became professor at the Tokyo College of Music and from 1975 to 1987 he was president of that college. From 1987 onwards he was the president of the Institute for Ethnomusicology at the Tokyo College of Music. He published a treatise on orchestration *Kangengaku-Ho* in 1933, revised 1968.

Unfortunately, Ifukube is primarily known in the west as 'the man who wrote the music for most of the Godzilla films'. Exhilarating though much of that music may be, it fails to take into account the serious music he has composed and that he is a classical composer first and foremost. It should be noted that to be a composer of film music in Japan does not automatically impart a status that implies denigration - as is the case in European culture.

His most popular works in Europe are his *Symphonic Ballet*, the *Sinfonia Tapkara* of 1954, the *Symphonic Fantasia* (basically because it contains virtually all the main themes and material used in his Godzilla films) and the sublime cantata based on the life of Siddhartha Gotama 563-483 BC, *Gotama The Buddha* of 1989 for choir and orchestra, which is, beyond all doubt, one of the most significant choral works ever composed.

Symphonic Ballet (1943)

The Swedish label BIS, famous for its cycle of rare works by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, entered the rarely explored arena of Japanese music in 1990 with five works by five composers that span a period of four decades.

Akira Ifukube: *Ballata Sinfonica* (1943)

Karen Tanaka: *Prisms* (1984)

Yuzo Toyama: *Matsura* (1982)

Atsutada Otaka: *Image* (1981)

Kaoru Wada: *Folkloric Dance Suite* (1987)

The Maimo Symphony Orchestra conducted by Junichi Hirokami.

Of these, only the piece *Prisms* by Karen Tanaka (b 1961) is nothing more than eminently forgettable and utterly disposable noise; some colleague really should have informed her that this kind of sonic doodling became obsolete after 1975 when the claims of the avant-garde had finally been proved fraudulent. Yuzo Toyama is better known as a conductor while Atsutada Otaka is the lesser known brother of conductor Tadaaki Otaka. These works are worth our attention but only the *Folkloric Suite* by Kaoru Wada deserves repeated plays. When I hear this suite I want to invade someone else's country - loudly.

It is the Ifukube work that concerns us here, of course. At 16 minutes it is the longest piece of the disc. *The Symphonic Ballet* (the Italian title *Ballata Sinfonica* is used on the CD booklet), in two movements, is an early work composed not long after the *Japanese Rhapsody*, the work which made his name as a composer in Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The pensive aura that pervades the whole piece, even in its lively first movement, is due to the inspiration of the work: it was written shortly after the death of his

brother from radiation poisoning and is dedicated to his memory. The plaintive melody of the oboe that floats over and through much of the second movement leaves little to the imagination, and while this is hardly the best piece with which to introduce Ifukube to a new audience, it provides a welcome change from the more ebullient pages of his film scores with which we are more familiar.

The performance by the Maimo Symphony Orchestra (a Swedish ensemble) is polished, if not especially inspired, while the young Japanese conductor Junichi Hirokami deserves credit for his attention to detail, particularly the manner in which he ensures the woodwind are not swamped by the strings, a fault that many orchestral recordings display, especially in American orchestras.

The sound quality is exemplary, but then this is simply the high standard we have now come to expect from this label, although some listeners may find it a little clinical and lacking in warmth.

The excellent sleeve notes are written by one of the featured composers, Kaoru Wada.

LABEL: BIS (SWEDEN)

CATALOGUE NO: CD-490 (1990)

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Sinfonia Tapkara (1954)

In 1990 the King Record Company of Tokyo issued a series of ten CDs under the collective title 'Contemporary Japanese Music'. It therefore came as a surprise to me to discover that much of the music featured on the first and second discs was composed between 1930 and 1960. The complete set provides an excellent introduction to modern Japanese music, although some of the pieces on the later CDs are of variable quality, especially those written in an avant-garde idiom.

Rhapsodic is the first disc of the set and features five works by three composers. It is of interest to compare the two works by Yuzo Toyama with his contribution to the BIS CD reviewed above, especially since these two are far preferable to his later opus. The real discovery is the Koyama work, which is a delightful suite of miniatures that capture the essence of traditional Japanese folk themes filtered through the medium of a western orchestra. These three works are adequately executed by the NHK Symphony Orchestra under their modern music stalwart Hiroyuki Iwaki, a name one immediately associates with modern Japanese music of quality.

Yuzo Toyama: *Rhapsody* (1960)

Yuzo Toyama: *Berceuse* (1953)

Kiyoshige Koyama: *Kobiki-Uta* (1957)

Akira Ifukube: *Ballata Sinfonica* (1943)

Akira Ifukube: *Sinfonia Tapkara* (1954)

At a total duration of 46 minutes, the two Ifukube works provide over two thirds of the contribution to this CD, and are easily the most convincing both in terms of their orchestration and their thematic development. Here the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, under Yukinori Tezuka (a new name to me), offer a rather more puissant account of the *Symphonic Ballet* which I personally prefer to the somewhat stark, clinical version by Junichi Hirokami, despite the slightly abrasive brass playing (a frequent problem with Japanese orchestras) and thin string tone.

It is for the 30 minute *Sinfonia Tapkara* (or *Tapkara Symphony*) that I purchased this disc, and the work certainly deserves repeated plays, for it does not yield many

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of its secrets at first hearing. There are three movements in a fast-slow-fast structure, the first of which is preceded by a slow introduction. Tapkara is an area of Japan rich in folklore that directly informs the inspiration behind the work if not the music itself and is therefore similar in this respect to, say, *The Karelia Suite* by Sibelius or *Taras Bulba* by Leos Janacek. However, there are few Japanese themes here and the quality of the music is epic rather than folkloric. All three movements contain music that is very similar in style and idiom to that used in the first *Godzilla* film although this may well be because both date from the same year. The sound quality is reasonable, warm but rather murky in places, although I am relieved to see that these are studio performances since many of the later CDs are taken from live concerts. The sleeve notes (which are in Japanese, with no English translation) are extremely disappointing, but this is the case for all ten CDs of this set. For example, two paragraphs are required to write much but actually say very little about the 6 minute *Rhapsody* by Toyama while just 3 lines are devoted to the 30 minute *Tapkara Symphony*!

LABEL: THE KING RECORD COMPANY (JAPAN)

CATALOGUE NO.: KICC 2011 (1990)

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Selections from Gojira

For anyone who is interested in the music by which Akira Ifukube is most easily recognised in Europe, this disc is an excellent place to start. Called *Godzilla: Volume 1* it features selections of the music composed for a curious series of science fiction / horror films made in Japan between 1954 and 1975. Be warned: it contains music by other 'composers' which features trite, trivial 'pop' music designed to appeal to Japanese teenagers and is therefore of no aesthetic value. 'Gojira' is the Japanese name for a playful, rather cute and cuddlesome giant reptile known in the west by the more familiar appellation 'Godzilla'.

The featured music of Ifukube accounts for nearly 45 minutes duration so the disc is worth your purchase. A second warning is required with regard to the sound quality but this is hardly the fault of either the record label or the original performers, since music recorded for films during the 1950s was created in extremely primitive conditions on equipment that today would probably be scorned by a punk rock group.

Those with programmable disc players should listen to the Ifukube pieces as a 45 minute suite, since in this manner the irritating other pieces are avoided and the recording quality imperceptibly improves as we move into the 1960s. The rate of technological improvement can be witnessed most dramatically if you play the first track on the CD followed by the final track from 1975.

Eight films are featured for which Ifukube supplied the music and mostly substantial extracts are used. There are particularly fine moments, too, such as the superbly serene song from *Gojira Versus Mothra* and the memorable march from *All Monsters Charge* (known in Europe as *Destroy All Monsters*) that makes me want to invade someone else's country - noisily. I have given the direct translations of the original Japanese titles for a reason that is no doubt deeply profound but escapes me just now.

Gojira (3/11/54)

Gojira Versus King Kong (11/8/62)

Gojira Versus Mothra (29/4/64)

Three Great Monsters (20/12/64)

Great Monster War (19/12/65)

All Monsters Charge (1/8/68)

Gojira Versus Gigan (12/3/72)

Mechagojira Counterattack (15/3/75)

Although not stated anywhere on the sleeve (the notes are hardly informative), the music is performed by the Toho Studio Orchestra and Choir, usually under the direction of Ifukube himself. The string sound is frequently thin and ragged although the brass has a timbre that is unusually full and warm, a sound one normally associates with top quality European ensembles. There is the occasional impertinence of electronic filtering on some tracks but this was common even in classical film scores in Japan at the time and does not generally impose itself on the listener.

There is a companion to this disc (*Godzilla: Volume 2*) which features the film music composed by Ifukube and others from 1975 to 1984 although I have yet to hear it.

LABEL: SILVA SCREEN (GREAT BRITAIN)

CATALOGUE NO.: FILMCD 201

☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆

Symphonic Fantasia (1988)

Symphonic Ode: Gotama The Buddha (1989)

If you are as yet unfamiliar with the work of Ifukube or have only heard his music for *Gojira* then this disc is the best place to commence further investigation. To date this is the only CD available in the west that is entirely devoted to works by Ifukube.

The first piece, *Symphonic Fantasia*, is just under 15 minutes long and is scored for a conventional orchestra. The real surprise here is that he has taken all the best and most memorable thematic material from his 'Gojira' film scores and constructed an orchestral tone poem of tremendous exuberance that makes me want to invade someone else's country - violently. This really is a fine little piece that enables one to enjoy all that is especially moving in the film music but with professional performance standards with proportionate sound quality.

For me it is the second piece that made me eternally grateful that War Arrow had introduced me to the work of this man. As a student of Buddhism I am inevitably going to be interested in such a work as this *Symphonic Ode*, just as I was drawn to the mighty *Nirvana Symphony* by Toshiro Mayuzumi.

I mention the Mayuzumi work since it and the Ifukube pieces are both related, not only in subject matter but also the manner in which the music is designed not so much as a portrayal of the life of Buddha, but of the emotional response that results when one is confronted with the spiritual journey to enlightenment and becomes aware of the implications inherent in the biography of Prince Siddhartha Gotama who rebelled against his privileged status as a wealthy member of the aristocracy and devoted his life to education, the alleviation of suffering and the propagation of religious enlightenment once he became spiritually awakened.

However, where the music of *Nirvana* is profound and messianic, as if any representation of such subject matter is a sine qua non, this ode is intimate and refined. In fact, if Mayuzumi is the Japanese equivalent of Olivier Messiaen then, in style and idiom, Ifukube has (in this work) much in common with another Frenchman, Gabriel Faure. At no time does he shout at you or preach sermons. The music never makes grandiose claims. There are three movements; the first - *Siddhartha In Kapilavastu* - is scored for orchestra alone while for the second - *Meditation At Bodh Gaya* - and third - *Ode: Acintiya Buddha* - a mixed choir is added.

Although the performances are unfortunately taken from a live radio broadcast, the sound quality is clear and crisp yet not cold and there is hardly any intrusion of audience noise. The string tone is full but never sentimental while the woodwind are given just the correct balance of ascorbic bite and plangent body. The brass section are disciplined and thankfully bereft of that abrasive quality one normally expects of Japanese orchestras although one may have liked the balance to favour the choir more than is actually the case.

The copious sleeve notes are in French although there is an English translation which is abysmal and is in any case merely a much edited precis. Again the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra are the performers, this time under the baton of Kazuhiko Komatsu, together with the Tokyo Oratorio Kyokai who prove themselves adequate but only occasionally inspired singers.

LABEL: LES DISQUES DU SOLEIL ET L'ACIER (FRANCE) (LITERALLY 'DISCS OF SUN AND STEEL') CATALOGUE NO.: DSA 54024

DISTRIBUTION: SEMANTIC

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"THE OLD FART WAS NOW BREATHING FREELY
FROM HIS PERFUME BOTTLE ATOMISER AIR BULB
INVENTION. HIS EXCITED EYES, FROM WITHIN THE
DARK INTERIOR, WATERED IN APPRECIATION OF
THIS THOUGHTFUL PREPARATION..."



The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

IF I SEE YOU FLOATING DOWN THE GUTTER I'LL BUY YOU A BOTTLE OF WINE!

Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band Grow Fins: Rarities 1965-82

USA, REVENANT 210 5 CD SET WITH BOOK (1999)

Magic is a peculiar force, isn't it? You never know how it's going to effect anyone. The Magic Band certainly didn't know, even though they were entrusted with the Magic. I first heard *Trout Mask Replica* in 1978, very much a latecomer. Thank Heavens I did though, as it was a key document that I keep returning to and, looking back, there is little doubt that it affected the way I think about things, permanently distorted the tinted spectacles through which I perceive life. It happened at Liverpool Art College, and at the time I put it down to just one more exciting thing in the air. Yet the fact is The Captain was one of my tutors; his advice, relayed through the vinyl medium, has stood me in as good stead as any I've received from any human being. (Thanks Dave Pickett, wherever you are). Through his blues, jazz and poetry, his stories and ideas, and his genuinely weird presence and image, The Captain gave me something I could really live by.

But *Trout Mask* was an exceptional phenomenon, an unprecedented act of genius not quite fully understood by any of its perpetrators at the time of its release in 1969. Still less understood, I expect, by that many listeners. Long after the event we finally get this slab of CDs handed down to us, like hieroglyphics from an ancient civilisation. There are far more mediocre talents who have been given far more extensive luxury box set treatment so far. Maybe it's not always a good thing to get that treatment. I always said that once the Sunday Supplements know about it, it's a bad sign.

Well, this isn't a bad collection and if you're a Beefheart freak you'll have bought it already. Some of the material here has been available before on bootlegs, but here's an official release for it, along with better sound quality, a nice booklet (with excellent knowledgeable sections by veteran Beefheart collectors and experts, and a history by John French), video segments, and great unseen sleeve photos from the *Trout Mask* session.

The guitar and drum parts to *Trout Mask Replica* are laid bare by Disc Three on this collection, presented in an astonishing 70-plus minute sequence. This was collated from the so-called 'rehearsal' tapes, which far from being rehearsals in fact show a very late stage in the development of the entire lengthy and painful process that engendered the record. You realise by now that the whole story of *Trout Mask* is becoming better known by the minute, and it's being examined by experts as closely as The Zapruder film. Yet, as we gleefully examine the forensic evidence, I can hear the Captain himself admonishing us: he hated having to re-learn his songs for stage performance, comparing it to reaching into the toilet and drinking regurgitated vomit. Remarking on talents lesser than his own, he famously stated 'it's not worth getting into the bullshit to find out what the bull ate'.

Disc Three certainly works as a companion set of tracks to *Trout Mask*, a blueprint to be consulted alongside the real thing perhaps. There is, as Ed Baxter said to me, 'a tremendous amount of information' contained in these songs. If you got ears, you gotta listen. But we can't hear it all, no matter how often we listen. I suppose that removing the vocals, and hearing these skeleton versions, could be said to help the process. But then without the vocals we don't have *anything* like the whole story of that incredible double LP! Leaving aside the astonishing qualities of the man's voice, textures and growling effects stolen from Howling Wolf, and his Ayler-like untutored approach to blowing his sax notes on 'Hair Pie', what about his unique interior landscape as revealed through his poetry, stories, puns, word-play, startling images and indelible dada-phrases? Where are the amazing characters and images that run through *Trout Mask*, as rich as any created by American novelists like Melville or Hawthorne? Where is the heart-rending plea for humanity embodied in 'Dachau Blues', with the war image of 'three little children with doves on their shoulders'? Where is the Old Fart at Play? Big Joan setting up with her hands too small? The hysterical announcer, modelled on the Hindenburg disaster, screaming out his desperation at the fall of The Blimp? The hallucinating Octa-fish on the ocean's bed, enduring his Neon Meate Dream? The Hemingway-esque hobo looking at the moon, like a dandelion? The bird clawing the evening like a hammer? I could go on...I might ask, where is the Captain on this record?

A guest player in his own vision, when he should have the starring role. The survivors are starting to rewrite history, in their favour. David Thomas, he of Pere Ubu, has asked the above question and made a very telling set of observations on this already, and rightly too. 'Culture happens in secret', says Thomas. 'It is conceived within a brotherhood, Masonic and eternally closed to the uninitiated. Civilians are awed by cold ashes and dead embers. They rarely experience sparks of fire, and can misinterpret even those rare occasions when the curtains of the known world do get pulled back'.

Disc Three, as already mentioned, is no more than a reference work which comes in handy for a better understanding of the Trout Mask vocabulary. But you wouldn't want to read the dictionary for pleasure when you've got *Moby-Dick* lying unread on your shelves.

Disc Five is a rag-bag of old boots and live performances. Desperate for hoovering up any scrap, it even includes the Captain's fragments of 'Black Snake Moan' from some interminable radio show. That said, the two cuts from 1971 are pretty ace, and I enjoy his mellotron and keyboard solos - even if a more unkind soul has compared these to Rick Wakeman. Disc Four you might as well throw in the bin. It's got a bunch of crappy videos which you can only play on a PC - nobody I know has managed to make the fucking thing work anyhow. The audio part of it is some *Trout Mask* ambient chatter which would have been best left in the dumpster.

Which leaves Discs One and Two. And you realise if they'd only had a career as a weird R'n'B band, the Magic Band would still have been something very special indeed. The first Disc is a total winner actually, comprising home demos of songs from the A&M period, before and around the time of the first LP, and live versions of same from 1966 and 1967. 'Diddy Wah Diddy' was a favourite with disc jockeys who played it to death, and The Magic Band came close to scoring a national hit had it not been for an East Coast band who released their version at the same time. Disc Two, though not quite as resplendent, still has some necessary material



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from the *Mirror Man* and *Strictly Personal* periods, and contains an excellent version of one of my all-time favourite Magic Band numbers, that psycho-droneout hymn to dropping acid called 'Kandy Korn'. If you dig this period you'd be well advised to check out the recently remastered versions on CD of the official releases, *Mirror Man* and *Safe As Milk*, which both sound frankly magnificent.

From *Grow Fins*, we do learn a little more of The Captain's thoroughly erratic method. He was fond of writing lyrics down as they occurred to him, assembling diffuse scraps of paper, keeping these fragments in a bag and then pasting them together under the correct headings when time allowed. Or rather, compelling John French to do it for him, and treating him like a lackey to boot. One of the three acapella songs on *Trout Mask*, 'The Dust Blows Forward N the Dust Blows Back', was taped 'live' pretty much as the lines of song popped into his head. He pressed the pause button on the tape player, drew a breath, and waited for the next moment of inspiration to descend. You can hear all these gaps plain as day on the record. The same erraticness applied to his whole songwriting method, of which again we can hear evidence on Disc Five. A tune might start as a whistle from his lips, only to be transcribed by one of the musicians (in this case by Eric Drew Feldman), and finally, through constant practice, rendered into a coherent piece of playable music - which was not only playable, but repeatable. And all from the caprice of one mad genius. I think what's becoming clear now is that his visions and inspirations came to him in fits and starts; there was never a clear way ahead for him, a shining moment of clarity when the project would become obvious. And he always refused to entertain the obvious, the banal, the cliché - above all his own clichés, which can't have made the process any smoother. I have an image of ideas forcing themselves out of his head like lumps of granite along a digestive tract, popping out with great difficulty.

Most notoriously, this erraticness transferred to the method of tutelage involved in teaching The Magic Band to play in this new way. Stubborn and lazy, The Captain could not - or would not - explain in any but the most elusive and offhand way how the band were to proceed with making this music practical. 'Musicians have always recognised that drummer John French is the unsung hero,' says David Thomas, 'and the contributions of The Magic Band undervalued.' Yes, The Captain was spectacularly lucky to have John French, who knew how to transcribe music notation, but also was prepared to put up with this man's impatience and truculence. God, it must have been hell for them! Indeed, most of the 112 pp booklet of *Grow Fins* consists of gripes, complaints and whinges along the lines of 'we can't do it' from The Magic Band survivors. And yet they did do it. And what unearthly documents survive?

Clearly Don Van Vliet didn't know exactly how to express what he had to express, but his vision was absolute. Wrestling with his inspiration like a lump of clay, yet unable to mould it into the shapes that he wanted, he became determined to overcome all obstacles. He knew he had to make it happen somehow, at the expense of everything - a musical career for starters, because he did indeed have a shot at one. As for the misery he caused The Magic Band with his bullying and manipulative tactics - well, the cost of alienating a bunch of acid-head freaks seems a small price to pay for such musical greatness.

Anyway, just listen to me - I didn't even want to go down this route, and I would prefer to avoid any further prolonging of this sterile debate. John French was very talented, exceptionally gifted drummer and well-fitted to be the arranger and transcriber of The Captain's work. But he was not a genius. He didn't originate any of this powerful work, and neither did the other players in The Magic Band - as excellent as they were. Take away the Captain and you might have a bunch of reasonably good guitar-playing freaks. The Captain not only spotted their potential, he harnessed it. While his players could only write down the music or the words, and play it back to him, The Captain was the one actually doing it. He was the one who could utter a line like 'A squid eating dough in a polyethylene bag is fast and bulbous'. And the rest of us mere mortals spend our lives getting our heads around it!

Got me?

ED PINSENT

DRAG RACING RECORD CUMS DOWN ITS OWN LEG

Santa Pod

ASH INTERNATIONAL RIP ASH 4.9 CD (1999)

'A lot is good, but too much is just enough' (Old Hot-Rodders saying)
This CD is made up of 25 edited excerpts of live recordings made by Paul Williams on 29 and 31 May and 3 July at Santa Pod raceway in England. And I've got to ask the obvious question: why? Williams claims that he was bored with the current ways of experiencing sound. The answer wasn't going to be more clubs and more gigs. It was going to be something different. It had to be Santa Pod - where 2-car drag races are held along quarter or eighth of a mile distances. Williams was clearly impressed by his first experience of Santa Pod -

the roar of the engines, the screech of the tyres - and felt compelled to produce this document. But, in trying to encapsulate the experience of Santa Pod he's overlooked how important the other senses are to the full appreciation of what happens there. Without the sun glare, the blue skies, the garish paint jobs, the stench of burnt rubber, the taste of the heat and the engine oil and the hot dog stand - without that, all you've got is the commentator's voice over the tannoy interspersed with sudden engine roars and rumbles. Occasionally there's crowd cheers and applause. But that's it. It's left wide open to the interpretations of the listener - hopefully inspired by the sleeve notes which suggest that this CD documents everything from 'A day at Santa Pod' to 'Technical recordings of specialised technologies'. It's lots of things but clearly comes loaded with notions of its own unique relevance, leaving the unimpressed listener compelled to dismiss all the arguments in its favour and see it for what it is (even admitted to in the press release) - raw material for DJs to 'frighten the daylight out of the dancefloor'. So, yes, it will be sampled by talents mediocre and inept and, like the whale song albums of the 70s, will quickly become an overly familiar gimmick - an aural lava lamp, basically.

As a fan of Motorhead and Merzbow I was strapped in and ready to GO with this CD. All its cover blurb promise of 'Raw Power' and 'Monster! Monster!' and the complimentary set of ear plugs suggested a new level of self-inflicted sonic violence but instead of Maximum Penetration it cums down its own leg. It would have been much more interesting to give the source tapes to Masami Akita or Alec Empire so they could create something that really does live up to the expectations raised here.

'Too much is always better than not enough' - J.R. 'Bob' Dobbs

RIK RAWLING 29/11/1999

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LONDON KILLS ME

Various Artists

Variations 3: A London Compilation
PARADIGM DISCS PD10 CD (1999)

Essential. The third and final in a series of compilations assembled by Clive Graham which for the sake of conceptual unity only feature musicians based in London Town and environs. A champion of free and experimental music, Graham's soapbox stance is partly fuelled by dismay at the lack of recognition (and money!) given to London musicians who are - in his view - currently producing some of the most challenging and exciting music to be found. The compiler has been backing up this claim regularly with these *Variations* compilations, but for my money this selection of his 'personal favourites' is the best one yet. It reveals a nightmarish and twisted take on Dark London, which in year 2000 is clearly becoming Post-Dickensian in its bleakness - a town lacking in focus, flounced up with cosmetic window-dressing like the Greenwich Dome and the Wheel, fripperies which serve only to conceal the social ills and injustices, the foundering economy, the lack of basic decent humanity everywhere, and the retrograde culture that assumes all men to be loud, beer-drinking, lecherous, football-loving louts. The IMAX cinema in Waterloo for example displaced hundreds of homeless people living under wooden pallet shelters from the 'bullring' near St Johns Waterloo Road, replacing that makeshift community with a soulless entertainment-plex dedicated to showing *Fantasia 2000*.

Actually, it's only my own sense of personal alienation I carry around with me in the city, and so I find solace and comfort in the pockets of weird and distinctive voices embodied and estamped on these recordings, reassuring me I'm not alone in perceiving that the world is sinfully askew! *Variations 3* showcases great gobbets of blasting electronic noise alongside some extremely developed examples of the strange and savage beauty of the human voice's capabilities. In an age devoted to mono-culture idiocy, this insistence on peculiarity and singularity is precisely what we need. Three

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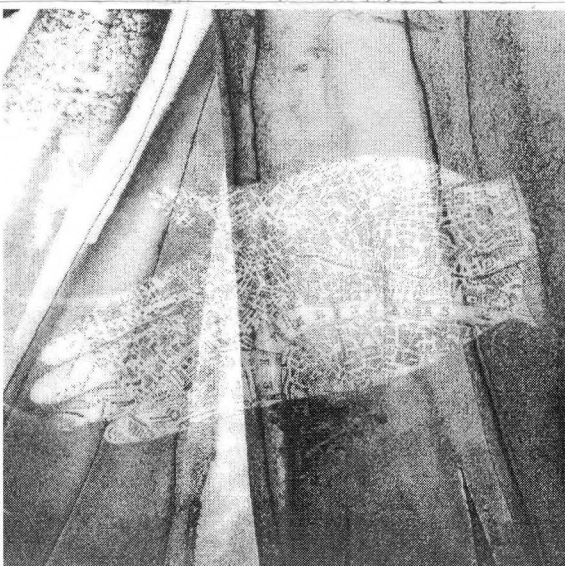
electronic pieces by Syngen Brown open the CD, and they kick ass - this guy is the king of the ring modulator and reverb units! 'Ruckhousing', Rainer's Corpse' and 'Midland Educational' are all thorough investigations of the environmental recordings he works with, and the powerful noises that result are lean, disciplined and assert themselves like blocks of stainless steel. As good as any contemporary work in the field - yet these are Brown's first ever releases.

The track by WITS is four women performing live at the Lewisham Arthouse (another small London-based pocket of cultural resistance clinging on by the skin of its teeth), and features the first of our idiosyncratic human voices, this one emanating from the estimable Viv Corringham. This live cut is a triumph of unskilled playing, recalling not only the glory days of The Slits (just check out the picture of one of the women wearing a lampshade), This Heat, but also of Company Week before it became too goshdarned polite and staid. This track reeks of invigorating risk-taking, with its ethereal wailing, twisted synth sounds and rattling of junk percussion.

Voltage exhibit the same determination to sound as distinctive as possible. Our second 'voice of weirdness' comes from one Sharon Gal, who impersonates a madwoman trying to control an hysterical outburst. She's supported by a guitarist and percussion on this melancholy track, and Voltage demonstrate that real improvising is about finding your own voice and your own sound, not about having to impersonate established greats like Evan Parker. This cut comes live from The Klinker, a well-kept secret venue at a pub in London where the spirit of anarchy and freedom prevails - though I suspect that not every evening there produces music as good as this!

Phil Durrant, Clive Graham and Aguires Pantaleão all turn in electronic-based music and it's all highly individual and greatly recommended. Durrant's 'Depths' is a lethal assassin of a track, another robustly butt-kicking noise which comes roaring in with no apologies, then stays there spitting out its nasty throbbing rhythmical bursts which reflect his liking for the sort of dangerous Pitch-Black Techno music which reputedly lurks in the underground clubs of South London in the earliest hours. Like much of the compilation, Durrant's piece really puts your back to the wall - insisting that there's something vital at stake. Crucial. Graham starts with pieces of found magnetic tape and presumably works in the good old-fashioned IRCAM way to generate a frankly terrifying slab of white noise, vast echoing caverns, and doomy clangs. Loud and portentous, his 'Time spool' is powerful enough to vibrate the listener back in time. Aguires P kind of stands out in the comp as he's as close as can be to a 'professional' - a Brazilian composer, graduate student of electro-acoustic music and winner of a prize with this 'Three inconspicuous settings' recording. Also it's the most subtle piece of music here, making him a contemplative ascetic in a compilation full of roarers, weirdies and wildmen. His extended abstract whirrings are full of shimmering changes in pitch and timbre, with occasional sound-windows onto field recordings, leaking in seamlessly.

Andrew King the folksinger, and Bob Cobbing the sound poet, are the third and fourth of our idiosyncratic human voices. King takes a break from his preoccupation with English folk, and turns to America this time - turning in his version of a 19th century Episcopalian hymn. 'Ninety and Nine', based on the singing of Frank Proffitt, is a stirring religious song and contains a gloss on the parable of The Lost Sheep. King's vocalising (normally acapella) is here leavened by his harmonium playing. Bob Cobbing is a 'senior member' of the poetry and sound poetry scene, greatly cherished by many Londoners who have each discovered him in their own time. In this live recording, which includes the 1964 poem 'Alphabet of Fishes', he comes across like a scary mad uncle of the avant-garde, ejaculating his Dada-like chants and nonsense syllables with a bearish growl. The brief 'insults' piece - a compilation of 'quaint' old English words which should never have disappeared from currency - nearly completes our Dickensian tour of London.



We finish with a bewildering snippet, taken from the ultra-rare Hastings of Malawi LP from 1980. Clive Graham might I suspect be something of a rarer-than-thou, weirder-than-thou collector when it comes to curating old vinyl treasures. This particular scoop is no exception, but it is a real scoop! In this brief extract we hear a distorted old Children's LP (from before the days when the Incredibly Strange Records mentality co-opted everything of this sort), followed by an extract from the old speaking clock...as juxtaposed absurdist statements on the futility of existence go, it's a classic - and will leave you feeling about as bleakly abandoned as it's possible to feel. The original record *Vibrant*

stapler obscures characteristic growth featured John Grieves, Herman Pathak and Dave Hodges - all early associates of Nurse With Wound. Of the 300 copies of their LP which survived, most were only sold mail order through the United Dairies network - allegedly, as a 'comedy' record. Safe to say we'll never see a copy. The original sleeve art (reproduced here in the luscious arty booklet) looks utterly cracked.

ED PINSENT

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The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

KRAUTROCK LEGEND REVEALED AS FAT UK HIPPIE

The Nazgûl

Habitually c/w Plujectories

DAY RELEASE RECORDS 12" VINYL DR103 (1999)

A cherished illusion or two bites the dust with this issue. You may recall The Nazgûl's sole release - and associated records from the mysterious Pyramid label - being reissued by Gary Ramon's Psi-Fi label in recent years, under the Krautrock banner. There was a mini-brouhaha as Krautrock devotees claimed these unheard obscurities were modern 'fakes'. Turns out that Toby Robinson (and not Tony, as I have mistakenly printed in previous issues of SP) is still alive and well, and a thriving Hippy record producer. The Nazgûl was him and his assistants, working under aliases - and as an Englishman abroad in Cologne, he produced all of the Pyramid releases. They now emerge as Krautrock-manque records - ie they happened to be have been produced in Germany in the 1970s. I suppose if the same music had been issued in England, say on the Harvest or Neon labels, it might not have had quite the same cachet.

No matter - the music still resounds mightily. Persuaded to resurrect The Nazgûl alias for one last dying burst, Toby Robinson and crew returned in 1999 for this single vinyl release, and a short (very short!) live final performance at the Water Rats in Grays Inn Road London, on the 6th September. That live show will stick in my memory, mainly for its visual bravado - one of the players dressed in a white boiler suit, with headphones over his face, and manipulating a makeshift trumpet (paper cone over a length of metal pipe) along with bits of scrap metal and a stepladder. Those were fifteen minutes of awesome and terrifying noise. Robinson, of course, appeared as though he couldn't care less - seems he had been dragged away from working on the latest Gong LP in the studio for one night, to blast out the sort of nonsense he could probably do in his sleep. An admirable attitude.

This isn't a bad little record either, although without that sense of portentous doom that I have come to associate with The Nazgûl's LP. Two sides of reasonable atmospheric chattering drones, created using 'an accordion, a 20 foot drainpipe, human voice and 270 metres of microphone cable as their sole instrumental sources'. It's housed in a totally inappropriate designer sleeve and I'm not sure if it plays at 45 or 33. The latter speed however makes it last longer, fit for savouring a cherished illusion.

ED PINSENT

Day Release, 8 Moat Place, Stockwell, London SW9 0TA

BURP. SQUEAK. TWANG. FOON. SQUEAK. SILENCE. BUBUBUBUBUBU. SQUEAK. GNGNGNGNGNGNGNG.

TAC / factor X / E / Runzelstirn and Gurgelstøck Collaboration

PERVERSE SERIES NO 1 CD (1998)

Four artists. Three countries. One bizarre piece of shit. What an impenetrable mystery is this. The contributors are, so far as I can tell, all woven into a single work which takes up the full length of this CD. TAC is Tom Cox, an American. E is from London, England. Runzelstirn and Gurgelstøck are from Switzerland, and should be known to at least some of you. factor X is the only name with which I am familiar.

factor X has been responsible for some of the finest, and most infuriating cassettes of the last ten years. His earliest releases included amusing conceptual items like a cassette in which the actual ferric oxide tape was an inch-long strip stuck on the inside of the plastic cassette shell - so you couldn't actually play it - and a tape of which the master copy was found lying in the road, presumably chucked out of a car window, reproduced as factor X found music. I say 'conceptual' but as I understand it, wor'lad wasn't actually bothered by such concerns. He just did these tapes because it amused him. More 'conventional' works ranged from near-unlistenable noise to tape collage, to screwed-up wailing folk and even a few killer pop songs.

Fuelling his creative endeavours was a consistent and continually evolving mythology, centred upon the number 15, which he deemed to be of some highly personal symbolic significance. This preoccupation manifested itself with 15 determinants - tiny fragments of sound: noise, meaningless splinters of a spoken phrase, minuscule edits of some forgotten melody. Each determinant became more and more familiar with each cassette, like the unreadable aural hieroglyphs of an alien language. They meant something to someone somewhere, as presumably did the visual determinants of which there was one

corresponding to each sound. These turned up on covers, and in his visual art. One, if I remember correctly, was entitled 'ree', and looked a bit like a fish. Another was probably something that happened accidentally on a photocopier. Perhaps it was all meaningless, but, added to the bewildering and sometimes beautiful music, it lent factor X tapes a compelling quality entirely absent from many other cassette releases of the day. There was something going on with factor X that seemed more substantial than the usual bloke with a Throbbing Gristle album who goes out and buys a synth and a tape deck, and at times you'd begin to suspect that Nurse With Wound were actually just another pub rock band.

So where does that leave us with regards to this CD? The majority of the playing time seems to be taken up with silence. Tiny little nuggets of dry sound blip up at unpredictable intervals. Burp. Squeak. Twang. Foon. Squeak. Silence. BuBuBuBuBu. Squeak. GNGNGNGNGNGNGNGNG. Someone tunes a radio. Silence. Honk. Foon again. And so and so forth. A truly accurate review would probably have to be written in the form of one of Marinetti's Words-In-Freedom pieces, which is the closest I can come to describing what's going on here. I can't even say that it's good or bad, or whether I dislike it or not, because it transforms the CD player into something with an entirely different function to the usual. Listening to this isn't like putting on Shakin' Stevens, or even Faust, and checking it out. All I can be sure of is that this CD exists, like a big slab of matter, like the lunar monolith of 2001: A Space Odyssey before we found out what it did. I think stating that this CD exists is a good thing. It certainly demonstrates how artless the likes of LaBradford and Oval are. I'm confused.

WAR ARROW

*From Nicolas Genital Grinder, PO Box 75032, 17610
Kallithea, Athens, GREECE*

TWO GUYS BASH A METAL SHIP WITH HAMMERS

The Sons of God

The Object

SWEDEN, FIREWORK EDITIONS RECORDS FER
1014 CD (1999)

A fairly singular recording indeed this - concocted by our good friends Leif Elggren and Kent Tankred, for whose other recent efforts see elsewhere this issue. This piece of sound art proceeds from a pretty bizarre premise, and one with which I personally have a certain sympathy. It's to do with the idea that sounds might somehow be encoded within objects, and that there may be a scientific way of extracting them. Imagine a potter's wheel, the rotating of the ceramic and the inscribed grooves upon it acting like a groove similar to that on an LP record. Sounds might be 'recorded' in a primitive way upon such a groove. If you could find the right stylus - say a very sensitive laser beam - suppose you could unlock the sounds of the past?

A ludicrous concept, right enough - and since I'm clearly not the only one to have heard of it I'm surprised it hasn't been on *The X-Files* before now. Having read about it in a science magazine, I did a short comic strip on this conceit some ten or twelve years ago and mused on the illogical conclusions to which it might drive an enquiring mind. I never imagined it might result in this - *The Object* - wherein our two sound artists apply this same cracked logic to an actual physical entity, and a huge one at that. They've latched onto a fishing boat apparently used for military / spying means along the Baltic coast during the Cold War; The Sons of God have explored this metal ship using highly sensitive microphones to 'extract locked, frozen or dormant information from the complex interior of the object.'

This immediately summons up the image of two very earnest and perhaps rather pretentious men crawling all over an old trawler and imagining they're hearing all manner of occult and cryptic messages as they bang their mallets against a steel bulwark. The Cold War fantasising links them to some rather

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less fanciful explorers in the same area - our own Disinformation, or S.E.T.I. On the other hand, if you're expecting something like the ultimate 'Metal Industrial' album, you might be disappointed. *The Object* is no Neubaten-styled clanging sheet-metal deconstruction exercise. The record rather sounds like an extremely ominous hum from beginning to end, as though someone were continuously rubbing against a huge twenty-foot gong with a metal vibrator. Hoping for secrets, the listener is kept on a knife-edge of expectation, only to realise it's going to be like this for the entire 66 minutes of its duration. Actually this is no bad thing, since it starts to sound almost like music when you grow used to it. If you dared to play it continuously and at a high volume, who knows what dark occluded messages you might reveal.

ED PINSENT

RAM ON!

Anima-Sound Musik für Alle

ITALY, ALGA MARGHEN PLANA-A 4TES.027 CD (1999)

Fan-terror-tastic! This record is not only a musical winner, sure to appeal to broadminded fans of electronica, 'out' jazz, and wacked-out rural psychedelic music - it's also one of those rare items where the music actually lives up to the promise of the bizarre story behind it. Which would you like to hear first? The story it is, then. In 1971 an egalitarian hippie couple called Paul and Limpe Fuchs had been travelling around Germany in a wooden caravan, pulled by a tractor. Wherever they stopped, they played their bizarre music in the town square for the villagers and townfolk - just like the musicians of Bremen, only this is even stranger than legend. Seems they were banging a large bass drum, shaking their percussion, and whipping it out on some home-made instruments - which creator Paul Fuchs modestly named after himself, including the 'Fuchshorn' and the 'Fuchsbass'. Outgoing and generous, I guess they sincerely believed in taking their 'art' to everyone who'd listen, but God knows what the audience felt upon catching sight of these two freaks, let alone hearing their eerie blasts - most sensible petit-bourgeois gentlefolk would probably have rather thrown themselves into the gears of their own windmills than endure such musical hell.

These hairy naturist libertarians eventually wound up in Düsseldorf and parked their caravan outside a recording studio owned by Willy Neubauer. Instead of immediately calling the polizei, he took them in, and, after hosing them down with jets of hot water, let them run rampant in his recording studio with their mad ideas and their demented instruments. Three days later, Willy had added exciting ring-modulator effects to some of the ghastly ear-splitting wails of Limpe Fuchs, put a little phase on the drums, and these two 17-minute tracks - called 'N DA DA UUM DA' and 'TRAKTOR GO GO GO' - were soon enshrined in a vinyl release in 1972. Now at last the world is ready to fully appreciate the Anima-Sound, and we've the groovy Alga Marghen label to thank for providing this reissue - along with the priceless 'Dozy Old Ram' cover art, and an unbelievable photograph of the Fuchs doing their funky thing on the back cover. Yes, the Fuchshorn is there, the very sight of which makes a mockery of all you hold dear. If you're a Vic and Bob fan and usually collapse into fits of mirth when Mulligan and O'Hare play their ethnic instruments, you're about to learn that truth is *always* stranger than satire. Boy, do I envy you...get ready for untrammelled and untutored excellence in music, atonal wailing voices, insane horn blats and free blurts, all propelled by off-the-beat bass drum attacks that are simply, well, cretinous would be too polite a word. File this screwball next to Erica Pomerance's ESP acid-freak classic *You Used To Think* and Amon Düül's *Collapsing*, and enjoy. Go Animal!

ED PINSENT

GODZILLA OUR ONLY HOPE

Godzilla Volume Godzilla Volume

TEMPLE RECORDS TOPY 073 CD 1989 (THIS RELEASE 1994)

This is the kind of release that restores my faith in taking chances on unknown CDs.

You know the scene - you're in some grit-splattered Music Exchange, dejectedly flipping through the scarred and cracked

jewel cases with an ever-increasing sense of despair, wondering just how many unwanted Bernard Butler and Faith No More CDs the world can carry before they reach critical mass and fall through the Earth's core and suck us all in after them - when you spy something...unusual. This is, of course, assuming you're someone like me who is always looking for something, ANYTHING that seems to be infused with a sense of potential beyond target 'markets' and lifestyle accompaniments. Usually it's a cover image, or a band name or even just the font used for the title. It has something, that 'What the Fuck' quality that forces you to lift it out from the racks and inspect it further. You check the price, you check out the sleeve notes and wonder if this is worth taking a chance on? Is it some forgotten gem that even the hippest, most eclectic record collection has yet to find space for? Would your money be better spent on a Big Mac Meal or the latest FHM? These are the questions you must answer. And so it goes, more often than not, you put the thing back and move on, never to know what you may have passed up. But sometimes the wind is blowing in the right direction, the stars are in their correct alignment and the moon is on the wane and that's when you do it. You pull out a crumpled fiver (because these chance items are rarely steeper than that) and you buy a piece of what you hope will be cracked sunshine. Back at home you put the disc on and as you fumble the creased and sweat-buckled booklet out of the case you get to hear the secret you've bought in on.

In this particular instance my £3.90 got me a cover drawing of a manga Godzilla, drooling semen-like globules of lava spittle as he clutches a gorily eviscerated Sonic the Hedgehog in his clawed fist. With snazzy smeared Kanji graffiti graphics it looked like a 14 year-old's art homework that had me instantly intrigued. The back cover is a messy collage of marker pen, tippex and what looks like blood, boldly warning: 'Don't Fuck With The Forces Of Nature!' The inner booklet is a comic - scrawled with a hurriedly minimalist approach last seen in 'Giant Skull On Wheels' - featuring Wongo Boy. He's a skateboarding, cereal troughing Bat Mite clone who

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gets to shag Catwoman before finding himself on the receiving end of a twatting courtesy of a much better hung Godzilla who fries the little shit with a FAGOSH! blast of Atomic Breath. Deliberately juvenile and inept it leaves the potential listener with a mixed sense of foreboding and idiot glee for what they are about to hear from the disc itself.

In between blasts of Akira Ifukube's original Godzilla theme you get a tour of outer fringes of late 80s pop, walking in the footsteps of nutters like the KLF. 'Godzilla Vs The Space Mutants' is looped metallic whines, Eddie Van Halen fret tickling and preposterous 'Rock Out' inflections stretched over a pit spiked with a resolutely 80s drum machine and moans sampled from porno films. 'Monster Island' is a 70s cop show 'funk' workout that brings unwanted flashbacks of *Coogan's Run* and the ridiculous Hippie party theme Pigeon Toed Orange Peel. It sounds worryingly authentic and comes Registered Delivery without any trace of the required 90s irony quotient. 'Mechagodzilla Vs The Sex Kittens From The Nth Dimension' has what sounds like Genesis P. Orridge wiffing on about 'packages' before he fades out and good riddance because here come liquid rhythms that predate Autechre by some years, giving a faint reminder of the keyboard rise from Duran Duran's 'Planet Earth' (yes, really) before more porn film samples are stirred in. It's 1989 and I can't help but picture 2000 people in a field in Essex, it's 2.AM, they're sweating pints and 'raving' along to this very track when suddenly they hear 'When I bend over you again, SHOVE your cock into my asshole'. They stop dancing, look at each other bemused and then shrug their shoulders before resuming the sweating and frugging.

'Dinosaur Bones' is more porno moans, biscuit tin drums and a Steve Jones riff repeated over and over until we get the message that it isn't going to go away anytime soon. A clip of Robert Plant promising to make you sweat and groove is put on display and it should have all been 2000 times louder to achieve the desired result. 'Way Down Insiide' is the need for a truly Jurassic, even Cretaceous vibe. Sadly this only goes as far back as the Friday Rock Show with Tommy Vance.

It all ends with 'Return To The Sea' where a choir of Harlem Angels Du Du Du Du Dududu du over another Autechre-esque workout that floats further down the gospel river the longer it goes on. And it goes on for a while.

In less than 40 minutes it's all over and the

listener is left reflecting that as an innocent expression of joy for all music, or pop-inspired experiment or even as a misguided art prank this is one worth hanging onto and exploring further. For me it was worth it for the Wongo Boy comic but the added bonus of a disc full of music that genuinely sounds to be coming from the heart and the groin of the teenager imprisoned in all of us, still hunched over the radio, listening without prejudice to the Top 40 countdown in a forgotten age before the evil Behemoths of MTV and 'Alt.Rock' shambled over the horizon to lay waste to the cities of our hearts and souls. We need Godzilla, now more than ever, to fight and defeat them before they destroy us forever. He's our only hope.

RIK RAWLING 13/07/1999



THE-THE-THE-THE-THE *DISC-URATOR'S* ① D E N ①

RECORDS ARE OUR
CHEESE MUFFINS

The Scepticism of Desirability

Melanie C Northern Star

VIRGIN RECORDS CDVX2893 7243 8 48525 2 8 CD (1999)

Just to get the tetchy disclaimer over with. In purchasing this CD I had to get a bus to and from my nearest mainstream record shop, W H Smiths in the lovely pink Elephant and Castle shopping centre. It being W H Smiths - and aren't those adverts with Nicholas Lyndhurst marvellous - I paid a significantly higher price than I would have done had I shopped around. The whole operation took over two hours. Therefore this is not reviewed as part of some elaborate gag, or because, hey isn't it just so crazy reviewing Melanie C alongside Dez Bailey and Merzbow!! Right, that's you lot told.

Squeaky big-eyed Spice does a solo album. The first track I heard from this initially fooled me into thinking it was Hole, except I couldn't quite place the vaguely familiar voice once I'd realised it couldn't be Courtney Love. Then the record ended and the irritating DJ informed me it was a song called 'Ga Ga' by Melanie C. 'Snakes alive!' I exclaimed. 'Oh crikey!' I expectorated, amongst other Bunterisms. I couldn't get 'Ga Ga' out of my head for a month, which is good going as I'd only heard it once.

Despite a smashing pair of albums, marred only by a few fillers, I've learned not to expect too much from solo Spice things. At best it's Mel B failing to quite connect with an otherwise fine Timbaland or Missy production. And at worst it's you-know-who reading out the menu of a Mexican restaurant over a Bontempi Latin rhythm. So, after her vocalising for Bryan Adams, I greeted the news of Sporty's impending rock megalith with a little scepticism. As it turns out, it stands up pretty good.

There's a couple of fairly nondescript numbers, as I suppose you might expect, but on the other hand *Northern Star* has a lot going for it. The lyrics at times verge on yer sixth form poetry, but there's nothing that embarrasses with the severity of an Oasis chorus. Some of the pseudo-ballads fail to blow the top of your head off, but all things considered her voice and the crisp production prevent any disasters of the kind that even the normally mighty Brandy or TLC sometimes perpetrate. Speaking of whom, TLC's Left Eye turns up on 'Never Be The Same Again', one of the numbers leaning more towards R&B. It's great to hear Left Eye rapping again. From the last two TLC albums you wouldn't suspect that it's the reason she first got into this crazy world of showbiz.

Northern Star spans quite a range of genres (R&B, techno-lite, digital grunge, piano knees-up, slowies, fasties) without sounding like a compilation. While the unremarkable numbers aren't so bad as to cause offence, the good stuff more than justifies my trip to that ludicrous pink shopping mall. Six months on and 'Ga Ga' hasn't yet outstayed its welcome. It's funny how sometimes these allegedly fake megastars manage to go one better than the lesser-known integrity jockeys. I saw Front Line Assembly play live in front of a bank of TV sets, and

a few years later U2 doing the same thing on a budget about 1,000 times greater. U2 still stand out as the better act. Irrespective of budget, their multimedia thing showed that there was at least some thought and wit going on, whereas Front Line Assembly just bombarded us with meaningless shocking images purporting to make some comment on whatever the fuck they were purporting to make some comment on. Similarly, *Northern Star's* finer tracks do what the generally hipper Garbage might do, had they elected to get around to writing a second song, instead of just doing 'Stupid Girl' over and over with different titles. Even with a radio-friendly production, Mel C still does the fuzzed drums and broken guitar screaming thing better than any turdy XFM hopeful I've heard in a long time.

I've got to admit I'm surprised by how strong her singing is. She's got a substantial pair of bellows driving out some of the rock belters. This is probably what saves some of the lyrics. They might have that

embarrassing earnest intensity of being sixteen and spotty, but with the voice and the musical setting, she pulls it off more often than not, leaving one with the realisation that yer archetypal teen poet usually feels that stuff with a passion that could power a space station for a year, no matter how badly it's written. Besides, teenagers have a right to be intense. If you can't be intense when you're discovering bodily hair, when can you? Sneering from behind your Desmond Morris really isn't on, or fair.

Well, I'm not sixteen with spots, but if I were I'm sure I'd love this to death. I'm over 30 with spare tyres, and it still sounds good. It isn't an unreservedly fantastic CD, but it has some fantastic songs.

WAR ARROW



www.elsieandjack.com/marino



aube | brume | drekka | fm synthesis | kawabata makoto | martiensgohome |
monera | outdrive | september plateau | shifts | subarachnoid space | tabata |
walking timebombs m/jad001d0300

The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

Fly Pan Am

Fly Pan Am

CANADA, CONSTELLATION
CST008 CD (1999)

'Acid Rock', 'Big Beat', 'Skunk Rock', 'Dad Rock'...it's always amusing to see a desperately befuddled music press scrabbling for a catch-all name to any new musical movement, as if without such simplistic definitions they would soon run out of ways to praise or dismiss the material they're hearing. So when bands such as Slint, Labradford and Mogwai first reared their ugly heads with their own particular variations on the quiet/loud dynamics initially popularised by 'grunge' (there we go again) it was obvious that hack reviewers and opinionators for a living were going to have to dig deep to find anything that could possibly serve their purposes - not forgetting that it had to be short and snappy enough to fit onto a strip of Dymo tape on record shop racks. So what were the key elements here?

Controlled dynamics, found sound instead of lyrics, almost narcoleptic progressions, Glenn Branca blastwaves of guitar and banshee howls of feedback mixed with Bernhard Günter-esque vacuums of minimalism and, in most cases, no sense of humour whatsoever. Well they took all that on board, scratched their heads and, no doubt, partook of some 'shit' for inspiration, and came up with 'Post Rock'. Well done.

Unfortunately the name stuck and is now a universally recognised term for any music that isn't Techno or wouldn't necessarily be featured on *TFI Friday*. But for all its inherent complexities it's a popular form with some labels specialising in it, particularly Constellation, comin' atcha straight outta Montreal with a short roster consisting of 'bands' and 'projects' with all the superficial glitz and shine of a stealth bomber, amongst them the critically acclaimed Godspeed You Black Emperor! and their various offshoots - 'Exhaust' and now 'Fly Pan Am'.

Behind the now regulation silk-screened cardboard sleeve (featuring some of the laziest and inept design work I've ever seen) is 60+ minutes of that which *The Wire* loves most. It's all about the power of repetition and the filling of spaces. It's what you hear out of the corner of your eye. It's the urban panorama compressed into digital sound - the restrained and introspective alternative to Merzbow's *Door Open at 8AM*. Subway trains, street traffic rumble, tyres hissing on wet streets. Garbage trucks, fire escapes, grease-bloated pigeons in stunted skeletal trees. Empty buildings, lift shafts, neon blurs. Images stirred by a thousand reportage flashes. The five tracks, all bearing defiantly French titles, blur into one another except for track 3 which is 17+ minutes, 10 of which is nothing more than the same note strummed over and over while static fizzles and drums tumble in the background. It's an endurance test - the sonic equivalent of Chinese Water Torture - and the only point on the album where the atmosphere is lost and you begin to suspect those involved are taking the piss.

Elsewhere it could easily be Godspeed You Black Emperor! without the lift and soar of the strings. But if, as some maintain, Godspeed You Black Emperor! are nothing more than your fave rock riffs bolstered by 'samples' of the more solemn classics (such as Barber's *Adagio for Strings*) then where does that leave Fly Pan Am. Open to easy dismissal for some perhaps, but they'd be missing the point. This is music that utilises the background noise of everyday life to create a sense of time and place for anyone living in 20th century cities. You'll certainly never hear a lift motor or a distant street jackhammer in



quite the same way again, as this record suggests that there are unseen phantoms at work, recording our daily trivia for some signs of a clue as to what we really are and why we do what we do. New juxtapositions of sudden edits and fade-ins seem to confirm that those involved know their shit and, in avoiding the pitfalls that so many hopefuls in this genre stumble into, have established new directions for the more adept pupils to follow.

Fly Pan Am are sure to appeal to those already inclined in this direction. They'll never inspire the same passion and hyperbole reserved for GYBE! or Mogwai but this is so far removed from the pale and bloodless efforts of others that it may as well be from another galaxy. But it is so very much from our world, those involved knowing full well that the answers don't lie in the gods or the stars. It's only us, what we do and where we choose to go. We are alone. There is nothing else.

RIK RAWLING 07/12/1999

Constellation, PO Box 42002,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H2W 2T3
Constell@total.net
www.total.net/~constell

Do Make Say Think

Do Make Say Think
CANADA, CONSTELLATION
CST005 CD (1998)

Toronto based DMST appeared on the critical horizon around the same time as Godspeed You Black Emperor! and quickly drew favourable comparisons. Part of this was a general desperation on the behalf of music journalists searching frantically for a new location to champion after Seattle, Bristol and Manchester had fallen out of favour but I feel that the significant factor in this is the recognition of the potency of the whole creative scene that has developed on the eastern Canadian border, a scene that embraces everything from Cronenberg to the seminal *Semiotext(e) 17: Canadas* collection. DMST also share the Constellation label with GYBE! but they are very much ploughing their own furrow, one driven by a perhaps more 'jovial' spirit and certainly by a wider range of influences - everything from punk, metal, jazz, dub, Pink Floyd, Can, Suicide, Low, Palace Brothers, 'hard jungle trance' and even 'eclectic art rock' - producing a sound that they themselves describe as 'Introspective Acid Rock on Valium'.

The band's name comes from a visit to a school classroom where the words Do, Make, Say and Think were printed on giant posters on all 4 walls. The notion of these children being subliminally force fed these commands seemed 'odd' to say the least, and the perfect name for a band that plays 10 minute instrumentals.

And so to the music itself: the atmosphere is urban and expansive at the same time. Post-industrial hinterlands give way to rolling flat plains under moonlit night skies. Passing cars hiss by on roads slick with recent rain. Ry Cooder riffs echo back on themselves as unexpected saxophone moans pass like night traffic. Bass draws the scene back to the side streets and the alleyways of downtown. Jazz clichés are sprayed over with graffiti scrawl and 'the old' is nothing but a canvas to work on - a million miles away from Sting's dubious appropriations and posturing.

The bass is the heartbeat, alive, throbbing with sensation. No drugs required, this is a pure adrenaline rush. The taxi passes a club where the doors are flung open to cool down the folks inside and the funk and sweat spills out onto the sidewalk. Merzbow *Ecobondage* rumbles

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

and fizzes give way to a road movie score and Kevin Shields toying with a wah-wah pedal before it all crashes into the wall of a bar where inside the DJ has unleashed The Stooges *Funhouse* on the unsuspecting crowd.

DMST get it all out of their systems and move on to the final track, the one where it all comes together. 'The Fare To Get There' is nearly 20 minutes long but by far the simplest in structure - perhaps the blissed out distant cousin to 'Mogwai Fear Satan'. Flute, drones and guitar brush against one another, settle into the groove and never outstay their welcome.

The packaging itself is a perfect compliment to the music. I've been less than impressed by some of Constellation's 'here's one I made earlier' efforts in the past but here they come up trumps with a simple cardboard sleeve and insert cards offering six different possibilities of cover image - all vague and indistinct but very much 'art'.

Wide open to possibilities and interpretation - which is the key element at the heart of DMST. You get the feeling they've only just started and long may they continue.

RIK RAWLING 01/02/2000

Constellation, PO Box 42002, Montreal, Canada H2W 2T3
constell@total.net
www.cst.com

Doug Snyder and Bob Thompson The Rules Of Play

DEAD EARNEST DER NCD 44 CD (1999)

Daily Dance was the obscure cult LP made by these American players when they were younger, released as a private press LP in tiny quantities in 1972. When Brian Doherty reissued it on his Warm O'Brisk label in 1998, many critics and listeners (ourselves no exception - see issue 5) were knocked into a cocked hat by the shimmering magnificence of it, and rejoiced to learn that here was yet another underground obscurity discovered, and what's more it even turned out to be worth discovering. It remains a stone classic of guitar and drum music, each player facing each other in a macho standoff and a duel to the death, playing as though the fate of millions depended on their every electrifying note.

The Rules Of Play is the rematch. The guys behind that 70s classic are indeed still active, and perhaps like Simeon Coxo of Silver Apples keen to supply further product to hungry young fans who have rediscovered their work. The duo put out *Robots* in 1991, which I've never heard; this one, released on Andy Garibaldi's Dead Earnest label which is home to many a spacerock and psych-stoner obscurity, comprises three live tracks recorded in concert or studio, with Snyder playing the Midi guitar or keyboards against Thompson's drums. It's pleasant enough, but in a blindfold test three out of four hep-cats completely failed to connect this spacey, melodic, meandering rock with the punky, abrasive energy of that 1972 LP. For a good 75% of the time, this music could be any Brand X Space-Rock combo from Seattle or Des Moines. Hell, most of the time Snyder is just playing dumb arpeggios which any 12 year-old with a Woolworths electric guitar gives up after the first few days. In fact, I'll go so far as to say it's generally dull and self-indulgent - not even Steve Howe, the guitarist out of Yes, would have dared try to palm off this sort of flabby flim-flam on his audience, not even in the mid 1970s when the most pompous outrages in the name of ego-tripping overlong LP releases were a common crime among major label stars. Snyder and Thompson need to check out a good Popol Vuh LP like *Einsjager and Siebenjager* if they want to learn some lessons about how to deliver *real* wrought-iron power from melodic guitar and drums.

Next time an undiscovered classic LP comes my way, maybe I'll learn to keep my big mouth shut - doing otherwise only seems to encourage them to come back for more...

ED PINSENT

PO Box 6921, Dundee DD4 8YN
andygee@dial.pipex.com

Immense Evil Ones and Zeros

FATCAT RECORDS FATCD006 CD (1999)

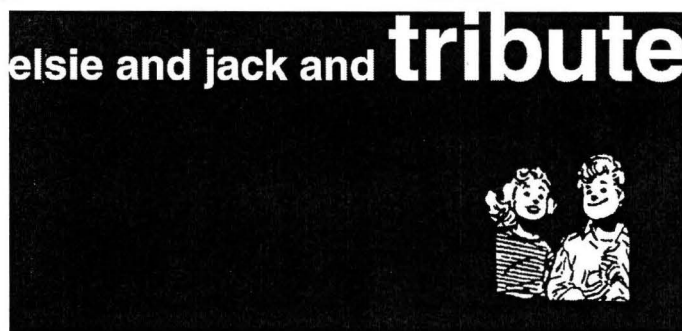
The ones and zeros of the title are the binary digits which are all that computers can understand. The title may therefore bespeak some kind of scepticism about the desirability of making music electronically. Whatever, this is a fine album of guitar-bass-and-drums rock music, its eleven instrumental pieces fizzing with inventive ideas and sparkling musicianship.

Most of the tracks are mid-paced. Typically, a relaxed bass line is bolstered by busy, intricate percussion and confident electric or acoustic guitar. 'Don't You Know How To Use Flippers?' (Immense have a winning way with titles; how about 'Neil Young In Sportswear'?) adds smoky saxophone to the mix, while 'Antro-Lateral Approach' features insistent, quietly ominous piano. But the other tracks don't suffer from the absence of such enhancements, so varied and striking are the guitar sounds employed.

Occasional snatches of voices taken from the radio attest to the intelligence at work. The opening 'Football Chant' has blasts of hard-hitting rock guitar broken up by a voice describing the use of antidepressants. On the impressive 'Really Optimistic', advocates of conservation are gradually overtaken by vigorous drumming and some fairly spectacular lead guitar.

The strengths of the album are its diversity and conciseness. None of the tracks outstay their welcome; they are sharp, focused and structured; they make a strong impression, then retreat. 'Really Optimistic' is followed by a melodic interlude of delicate acoustic picking and strumming, then by the excellent 'Spontaneous Combustion', wherein guitar, bass and drums build to a powerful crescendo. At the end, the heavy and urgent 'E Flat Sonic Boom' melts into the closing 'Valley Of The Mummies', in which serene piano and organ curl around sinuous percussion before ebbing sadly away.

RICHARD REES JONES



artists that may be

involved:

the autumns with
simon raymonde |
jessica baillif with
jesse edwards | warn
defever | drekka |
electroscope |
flashpap'r | brent
gutzeit | ida | in gowan
ring | in | monera |
monroe mustang |
patrick phelan | the
pilot ships | archer
prewitt | the scarlets |
south | ray speedway |
spies hecker |
spokane | swearing at
motorists | ben vida

summer 2000
www.elsieandjack.com

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

Papa M

Live From A Shark Cage

DOMINO RECORDINGS WIGCD71 CD (1999)

Not for Gatecrasher fans, that's for sure. Dave Pajo continues to plow the same furrow he started with Slint. And before Papa M there was Aerial M who received much critical kudos but had little to justify the praise lavished upon them (apart from the unique spectacle of a horny chick on bass when they toured in '98!). Now, in his latest incarnation, Pajo is down to business as (un)usual, pushing against the rigid confines of what the 'post rock' massive will allow.

Confusion abounds initially thanks to the packaging - cover image of boy and girl ice skating, regulation blurred typewriter text, booklet that looks like a Dulux colour chart - and the title with its suggestions of menace and imminent danger. Well, in the landscape detailed by Pajo's decidedly pastoral inclinations the only possible hint of menace could come from the hillbillies who live in a shack in the woods, swig rotgut moonshine and torture the local wildlife for kicks since the TV done got busted. It's not quite *Deliverance* but the potential for sudden idiot violence is always there, lurking in the trees. 'Pink Holler' is Fahey's *America* reviewed from a dewy-eyed end of the Century perspective. 'Plastic Energy Man' sounds like something from Jim O'Rourke's Fahey 'homage' *Bad Timing* - perhaps a track dropped for being too restrained. 'Drunken Spree' is EM tuning up to play The Doors 'The End'. 'Ups' is Sun City Girls to a tee - a short nonsense track of Lees Damson piano and squeaky floorboards recorded on a microphone held in a bucket of water - whereas 'Crowd of One' is, I hope, an ironic comment on the 'post rock' cliché of using telephone answering machine tapes instead of vocals and lyrics. Maybe the eclectic range of callers - from priests to doctors' receptionists, all calling the mysterious 'George' - is meant as the last statement on this kind of tomfoolery - and if so then it fails, drawn into the trap of unwitting self-parody like a fly to the web.

Not that any of this makes it a bad album - it's actually very, very fine. Pajo plays excellently throughout, never gets too showy, sustains the mood and makes many of the pretenders to his throne look like raggedy ass jesters. It's the work of a confident and seasoned artist - a painter in control of his medium, clearly focused on the desired result but not afraid to let 'happy accidents' occur along the way, adding unexpected colour and shape to the dynamics of his work.

The standout track on the album, the 15 minute 'I Am Not Lonely With Cricket' is more O'Rourke-style repetition - a steadily flowing brook of notes with the real 'action' occurring under the surface, gentle chords swaying and echoing in and out of the mix, sometimes caught in the light, sometimes lost in the deeper shadows.

Afterwards, banjos wade in on 'Knock Up The Casket'. Jarring and unsettling, it's the sounds of those hillbillies creating some infernal machine in the shack out back. 'Up North Kids' is the soundtrack to Stephen King's wistful reminiscences of growing up in rural Maine and 'Arundel' is the closer, a fully fleshed version of the opening track, one that's better dressed for bad weather as it treads off through the woods heading for the high country.

This is music for the folks - the stoopsitters and the churchgoers, the pick-up drivers and the logcutters. It's honest enough to acknowledge the advances of technology and the roar of the city but, at its heart, it realises that the best tunes are the one you can whistle. This is Dave Pajo on top form, a mature artist unimpressed with gimmicks and looking to forge some truth from what he's seen and what he knows. Let's hope he never finds it, the quest being all the more rewarding than the prize itself.

RIK RAWLING 23/12/1999

Domino Recordings Co, PO Box 4029, London SW15 2XR
www.dominorecordco.com

Matmos

The West

USA, DELUXE DLX212 CD (1999)

Little is known of Matmos but this, their 3rd album, came highly recommended. However, expectations immediately jump out of the window when this thing kicks off like OMD or, and I'm not kidding, Art of Noise at their most wankiest and nonsensical (as if they were ever anything but). If anything, it's most reminiscent of the 70s school programme theme tunes that came accompanied with kack-arsed animation of Meccano pieces and lumps of coloured clay. Or a Boards of Canada outtake, perhaps? It is considerably improved by a 50s sci-fi keyboard whine but we're still grossly unimpressed. Fortunately this is the only real bum track on the album. From Track 2 onwards it really gets down to business with Dave Pajo (Slint, Aerial M, Papa M) in full Ry Cooder mode, facing single strums of his guitar off against various sound effects including sudden bursts and fizzes and the amplified flipping of Bible pages. It's reminiscent of some of Zorn's *Locus Solus* nonsense but Pajo's sublime guitar work is infinitely preferable to Zorn's insistent skronk bursts. It's nonsense, like surreal graffiti, but it sticks in the mind and resonates for a long time afterwards.

Elsewhere there's more Pajo toying with Jim O'Rourke-style acoustic arrangements and remaining as restrained as it's possible to be without lapsing into a coma. Steel guitar and Western theme tunes are backmasked and bent out of shape. Distant train whistles, tumbleweeds and cacti silhouetted eerily against a blood red sunset - the images are all too familiar but now have drum & bass updrafts butting up against canyon walls of silence with vultures circling lazily overhead. As a celebration of the mythical and romanticised 'West' it succeeds because it doesn't rely on the tired old clichés. Unafraid to embrace contemporary studio techniques Matmos shed new light on old pathways and suggest a different interpretation of the facts. Never for a second is this record 'in your face'. It moseys on down the trail and invites you to follow it, in search of a time and place that we all know in our hearts but may not recognise even when we get there.

RIK RAWLING 13/12/1999

Deluxe, PO Box 14205, Berkeley, CA 94712 USA
Contact: Matmos/Vague Terrain, 800 Hampshire St, San Francisco
CA 94110 USA
e-mail: mcess@slip.net



1 0 1 0 1

1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0

MEPHISTO- BEATS!



Company Flow Little Johnny from the Hospital: Breaks and Instrumentals Vol 1

USA, RAWKUS P2 50101 CD (1999)

Like it says, this is an excellent collection of instrumental breakbeat music from a very imaginative and crucial trio of producers based in NYC. But you know what? It was the cover artwork that really hooked me into this release, which I studied with increasing excitement while my worthy constituent War Arrow played me his copy. The CD insert unfolds into a frieze of blurry photographs which tell a strange story, perhaps a day in the life of Little Johnny himself. The genius who assembled this spread should be making movies - these shots just reek of atmosphere, and half-convey a disturbing mystery tale in fleeting, broken images. Oddly enough, the lead character himself is 'posed' by a dummy - with his head in a plastic bag, and the ungainly shapes he throws suggest not only that Little Johnny might be paraplegic, but also correspond to the twisted shape of his psyche. There's a dark backstory here you see, regarding Johnny's parentage, hinted at by the story in the second track and a tiny little childish sketch-scrrawl that is just visible on the CD spine. When you piece it all together you'll be in for a pleasant shock.

Musically, this presents some frankly irresistible dance rhythms, a very crisply recorded surface, and a real depth of layered sound that could hold its head against any record by Massive Attack, and it's damn near as funky as any 'electric period' Miles Davis workout. I must have a soft spot for the instrumental side of this field, because I gotta admit I'd probably pass it by without blinking if there were vocal tracks added. Not that this trio haven't delivered the goods in that area too - this record is to showcase their musical inventiveness, and give their dark imaginations a field trip too with the Little Johnny scenario. I think at least one of them is fairly heavily into intellectual science fiction, such as Philip K Dick and other similar mind-benders. A terrific listenable and danceable collection of work with many a good twist of weirdness on every track.

ED PINSENT

Transgenic Horsey / Bellboy

ELECTRIC TRANSFUSION E-TRANS 009 7"
VINYL (1999)

I vaguely recalled the Earthly Delights catalogue claiming of this single 'none dare call it drum and bass', which seemed fair enough as I don't think I *would* call it drum and bass. On closer inspection I realised it actually says 'none dare call it a side project as Mr Ayers demonstrates what happens next in drum and bass', which is a different matter entirely. Okay, so this is an adjacent endeavour

from he of Nocturnal Emissions. Previous works by that band which purported to rework popular yooof music of the day include *Viral Shedding* (mutant Hip-Hop perhaps), *Songs Of Love And Revolution* (electro pop) and more recently *Binary Tribe* (rave house, sort of). These have generally been successful because instead of just aping something, it's been taken to bits and affixed back together again with glue spewing out all over and the decals in the wrong places. Of one early beauty collection, the press releases said something like 'this is what pop music sounded like before THEY got hold of it', THEY being the powers that be, and this was a pretty good description. *Viral Shedding*, as well as being pretty funky, was raw, aggressive, cantankerous and thoroughly refreshing because it sounded a million times purer than the Pigbags and Kane Gangs of the day. Whatever approach Nigel used worked for the same reason that The Fall sound better than The Smiths.

This isn't a bad record by any means, but I can't see it working as drum and bass. It seems to shuffle along at too slow a speed, and lacks the all-important bottom end that makes for such a dramatic contrast between pounding stomach-cramping bass and nasty tinny snares going off ten times a second. I can't see it being the future of the genre either. I suppose to his credit, he's avoided the temptation to just remake the same record everybody else is doing and, worthy though that may be, I can't see it giving Panacea any sleepless nights.

However, if you ignore any suggestion of Junglist ambitions, this starts to sound okay. In fact if you play it at 33, which is probably not the intended rpm (I threw caution to the wind, after all there's nothing to say which speed it's supposed to revolve at) it mutates into a sort of primitive robot jazz, perhaps of the kind you'd find the Cybermen enjoying during the last days of the planet Mondas before it was destroyed in the classic *Doctor Who* tale *The Tenth Planet*. Four episodes. 1966. Directed by Derek Martinus. Gibber. Gibber. Ahem...Yes. Not much doing at 45, unless you feel like waiting ten years in order to flog it to a collector at a highly inflated price. But play it at 33 and you might just want to hang onto it.

WAR ARROW

Earthly Delights, PO Box 2, Lostwithiel, Cornwall PL22 0YY, UK



The Sound Projector SE7ENTH issue 2000

Rob Zombie

American Made Music To Strip By

USA, GEFEN RECORDS 4903492 CD (1999)

Here be remixes...of tracks from Rob Zombie's first solo album *Hellbilly Deluxe*.

By 'remix' he means roping in Nine Inch Nails deputies and teutonic grimcore merchants Rammstein (amongst others) to ditch the bass and drums, fuzz out the riffs and add a few beeps and bleeps behind RZ's trademark phlegm-growl. Rob pretends he's a werewolf, the titles are as dumb as a pizza crust (Porno Holocaust mix, Ilsa She Wolf of Hollywood mix, Girl on a Motorcycle Mix) and it all quickly collapses into an indistinct mush of digital flatulence that sounds exactly like Depeche Mode molested by Guns N Roses in the bedroom of a 14 year-old kid from Iowa. The key ingredients are: Universal Studios, Creepy, Ed Wood, Hanna-Barbera, Russ Meyer and Freddy Krueger. It's stunted adolescence with a record contract, a flair for marketing and a keen sense of timing. RZ clearly believes in his horror movie wank fantasy neverland - populated by green skinned porno bitches and tattooists cartoon flash made flesh. Dripping eyeballs leer and skulls grin while the man himself prowls a stage full of burning crosses, surrounded by his Viking ghoulfriends and artfully caked in grave slime and getting away with it because They Do Not Doubt what they are doing - not for a second. Zodiac Mindwarp started this ball rolling back in 1986 but RZ has fully realised the market potential and now stalks the malls of the USA like a Texas Chainsaw Ronald McDonald.

But who the fuck is buying it? Even your typical 'techno goth' with their Matrix wardrobe and 'dangerous' websites bookmarked are going to think this is bollocks. And it is. It's absolute bollocks. It's one of the stupidest records I've ever heard, made all the more stupid by the fact that RZ just doesn't get it. It makes Billy Idol's *Neuromancer* sound like Einstürzende Neubaten but I guess our Rob, pockets spilling out with gravedirt and dollar bills will think he's above any criticisms. And maybe he's right?

Never the less, this is bollocks, as opposed to The Bollocks. The gulf is wider even than supernature.

RIK RAWLING 20/12/1999

Rob Zombie, 8491 Sunset Boulevard #215,
Hollywood CA 90069 USA
www.robzombie.com

Khan

Passport

MATADOR OLE 338-2V CD (1999)

Not, as I'm sure you realise, the Ricardo Montalban look-alike who will in a few centuries terrorise the crew of the Starship *Enterprise* on more than one occasion, resulting in the sad, but short-term, demise of that ship's science officer, Mr Spock. No, this is some New York techno geezer who has put out more than four million records, each one under a different pseudonym. *Passport* collects just a smattering of his many endeavours.

It's reasonably varied, though not so much so as to sound like a compilation of unrelated artists. From the evidence on display, Khan specialises in that brand of techno dance which you're supposed to enjoy at home as well as one the dancefloor. It's complex and fiddly with little sequences and

skittery hi-hats scurrying around all over like ants in an unexpectedly opened nest, so I suppose you could relate it distantly to Chris And Cosey or Leftfield, a bit.

The problem with a lot of this 'intelligent techno' is that it isn't actually that great to bop around to, unless you've ingested disco biscuits of a strength sufficient to get you frugging to anything from Showaddywaddy to Derek Bailey. I don't know why, but somehow these folks always seem to lose sight of the purpose of the music, getting lost down a series of technological blind alleys, inadvertently mislaying the vital element of booty-shaking beats. It isn't all like that. Despite many square-assed tracks guaranteed at least to keep yours truly at the bar, Khan comes through on a few numbers, which tellingly are amongst the more simplistic of the set. 'Middle Eastern Cooking', 'Body Dump' (which features Julee Cruise), 'Time Square-No Time' and 'Say Anything' seem to work on my stereo and sound like some form of rump-shaking activity could occur. Other tracks vary from resolutely unmoving, to big beat with feedback style tedium ('Suck Blood') to just plain awful ('We're Fuckt In The Head').

The press release goes on about how famous Khan is and how jumping the joints are when he deems to get behind the decks. Evidently some of you out there think he's a jolly good egg. The liner notes boast that 'this compilation ties the noted composer / musician / producer's styles and sound together in such a way that his genius is undeniable. To our faces, that is.' Personally, I think that although Khan has, on the evidence here, produced some fine work, his 'genius' is still pretty deniable, and if the authors of the above statement wish to arrange a time and a place via the editorial address of this magazine, I'll be quite happy to reiterate what I've said in person.

WAR ARROW

Bowery Electric Beat

BEGGARS BANQUET BBQCD 188 CD (1997)

Try going a whole night without sleep. Then drink four cups of really strong black coffee and sit with your head against a faulty air conditioning unit while your next door neighbour plays Wu Tang Clan. This, some would argue, is the closest you'll get to replicating the unique Bowery Electric sound. But it's not that simple.

The past few years have seen 'space' or 'drone' rock bands proliferate like corpses in Fred West's cellar and they're all pretty much indistinguishable from one another. Cover photos of buildings, stationery catalogue-quality design, art school pretension in the track titles and a general air of narcoleptic indifference to such vulgar concepts as 'success'. The collective motto is 'Dare to Fail' and often a footnote in the *NME* is all they manage. It's easy to be dismissive of these acts and easy to overlook, amidst all the fog of self-pastiche and Spacemen 3 'tributes', that there are some genuinely interesting bands, quite literally, Out There.

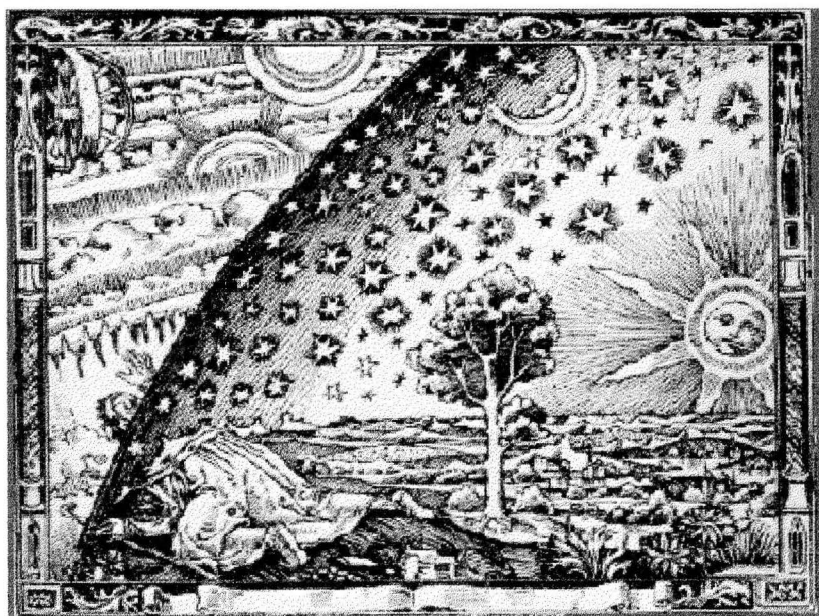
Bowery Electric (Martha Schwendener - bass, keyboards, vocals and Lawrence Chandler - guitar, keyboards, programming, vocals) are one of the few alleged 'post rock' acts that's willing to acknowledge the street pulse of hip-hop. For many, performers and listeners alike, the two styles are mutually divorced of all compatibility but Bowery Electric have fashioned something unique with their sonic alchemy. Beats, loops, drones, samples, dense walls of echo and feedback all filtered and compressed into a lush soundscape for modern urban existence. Rock and hip-hop first collided with the Aerosmith/Run DMC single back in 1986 and we're still reaping the bitter harvest of that union today in the form of 'acts' like Limp Bizkit and even Insane fucking Clown Posse. You would have thought that this kind of nonsense should have reached its zenith with the 1993 *Judgement Night* album featuring a whole host of traditional rock acts mixin' it up with hip-hop acts of the day, a bold venture that gave us Ice-T & Slayer together on one track. That should be the end of the line, that should be all she wrote. But no, some cavemen need to keep hitting themselves over the head with the same stick because it's all they know.

Fortunately there are wiser mutants who've taken their lead from different sources - like MBV's *Loveless* for example. Bowery Electric take the shuddering monsoon of guitar tones that drench that legendary album and spike them with linear insistent beats and a sense of the 'now' that reaches from the subway tunnels to the edges of the cosmos. It really is a sound that huge, a signal hauled in and caught within the mixing desk where layer upon layer of sound is applied like Jackson Pollock at the canvas. The art reference is appropriate because BE are concerned that this music is imbued with more than the all too fashionable notions of disposable 'product' that many celebrated contemporary musicians seem to believe is all that's worth striving for. The attention to structure, the insistence on the slow build and endless repeats means that you'll never hear a BE track used as background fuzz for some 'Yoof TV' announcement. It's simply too much, too dense to take in small soundbites. BE stretch their ideas out over 70 minutes and they need every available scrap of space on the disc. Vinyl is an inadequate format for them, another aspect that roots them very much in the near future. For me, this is the unspecified musical backdrop for William Gibson's *Virtual Light* / *Idoru* / *All Tomorrow's Parties* trilogy - logical extrapolations on current themes that suggest where we're all going and what we'll be like when we get there.

RIK RAWLING 31/01/2000

Beggars Banquet, 17-19 Alma Road, London SW18 1AA
www.beggars.com

DISCUS NEW RELEASE



Martin Archer - Winter pilgrim arriving

1. Angel words
2. The eclipse farm heresies
3. Beautiful city on the hill
4. A dream of broken and floating doors
5. Horn (by Nick Drake)
6. Death-runes, death-rumours, ruins, rains of death
7. Chemistry lock (Mike, Elton, Hugh, Robert)
8. Winter pilgrims arriving
9. River followers
10. Harbour town online

A new Martin Archer CD featuring Benjamin Bartholomew and Tim Cole (guitars), Derek Saw (cornet), Simon H. Fell (double bass), Charlie Collins (flute, sampling, producer), Gino Robair (percussion), James Archer (amplified objects), Mick Beck (bassoon) and Sedayne (crwth) alongside Archer's synthesizers, sopranino saxophone, clarinets, recorders and violin.

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The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000

“Man Proposes, God Disposes”



Van Dyke Parks

Interview and feature by Ed Pinsent

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I am personally delighted to have the chance to present this interview. If you ever read our second issue you may have seen my effusive praise lavished on *Song Cycle*, the extraordinary debut LP of Van Dyke Parks. I was, I think, prompted to buy it thanks to Chris Cutler's Recommended Records catalogue - throughout the 1980s he always kept it in stock as part of his 'Cultural Heritage' series. Like others, he drew attention also to the *Smiley Smile* LP, compelled for some reason to apologise for stocking a pop record in his catalogue of avant-garde and experimental music. 'Cool it until you've heard this completely extraordinary record,' he bumbled in print.

I bought a copy of *Song Cycle* not from Cutler but from Rhythm Records in Camden Town - in the days when they still stocked second hand vinyl. Since then it pains me to state that I have no trouble at all filling my Van Dyke Parks LP collection on vinyl - everything I wanted was available second hand, except *Tokyo Rose* which was marked down. These records were roses thrown into the dust. Doesn't anybody want these excellent discs? Oh, for shame!

When I took *Song Cycle* home it nearly made me ill the first time I heard it. I was shocked, to say the least. I haven't been shocked by a record since perhaps the first LP by The Residents. This would be about 1985, when I still had a few friends who I thought I could count on to share my musical tastes. Ha! I had only to mention Van Dyke Parks and nobody knew what I was talking about. I tried taping it for one friend - he absolutely hated it. Only John Bagnall caught on, and I feel sure he'll be as pleased as I am to see this interview.

In an effort to overcome my shock, I tracked down *Discover America* - only to be disappointed that it was a completely different style of record. Bewildered, I nevertheless persevered. *Jump!* was a total delight, as was the bootleg tape of it I managed to snag from a stall in Portobello market. As the years went by the secret history of Van Dyke Parks began to leak out - his name kept cropping up as a producer, arranger, composer, sideman and other musical roles on all kinds of interesting LPs. I think Johnny Black, the journalist, was the person who alerted me to this. Parks had a commercial career in pop in the 1960s - it shouldn't surprise me, but the records he made always struck me as far more deserving of the kind of 'auteur' status which is given unthinkingly to the Phil Spector of this world. Plus, everything he did was not only immaculately rendered, elegant in an old-fashioned way - it was also tinged with a kind of surrealism, stamped with his personality. I'm trying not to use the word 'idiosyncratic'. I bought records by Randy Newman, Harpers Bizarre, Little Feat and Harry Nilsson, in an attempt to scratch the itch. Peter Case called in Parks to arrange on song, as did T-Bone Burnett. The 1980 *Popeye* film by Robert Altman turned out to have a VDP soundtrack (effectively) - and bits and pieces of his other film work trickled down to the UK too (appearance in *Twin Peaks*, soundtrack for *Goin' South* by Jack Nicholson). When I tracked down a CD by Tony Trischka, an obscure banjo player, I soon figured out I was barely scratching the surface. It's called *World Turning* on Rounder Records, and amazingly it also features William Burroughs! Parks wrote, sung and played on one track, 'Ladies Of Refinement', allegedly whipping up the lyrics (filled with his witty wordplay) half an hour before they went into the studio.

Nowadays there's a website or two devoted to VDP. One of them lists every single record he ever worked on, which kind of defeats the thrill of the chase for me.

So, imagine what it would mean to someone like me to see the man play live? There was the Harry Smith tribute at the South Bank in the summer of 1999, but this was a taster for the biggie - a solo set at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, in which he played effectively the same set as appears on a CD called *Moonlighting* - which I don't own,

supported by a bass player and guitarist. The evening was, for the star performer, marred only by the lack of a sustain pedal on the piano supplied - but for at least one delighted audience member was an hour of bliss. In a charming stage set with a Victorian fringe lampshade and potted plants, Van Dyke attacked the keyboard with the gusto of a ragtime pianist. High spot of the evening for me was a solo version of 'The All Golden', and 'Danza', which I think was by a 19th century American composer contemporary of Stephen Foster. The set also included favourites from the *Orange Crate Art* LP, and 'Sailin Shoes' as tributes to his friends Brian Wilson and Lowell George. What also comes over on stage is the warm rapport Parks immediately establishes with his audience, and fascinating knowledge he shares. Erudite social histories, scholarly musical notes, pithy quotes and stories associated with almost every song are condensed into short expositions; he even paused near the end to read out 'The Lure of the Topics', a poem he'd picked up from one of his trips to the Caribbean.

Looking very dapper in a grey jacket, check shirt and bow tie, Van Dyke kindly spoke to me for an hour in his London hotel near the Embankment on the 17th December 1999. As he talks he freely associates with any number of tangential topics, his speech thick with recondite references and subtle word-play. He's well informed on many subjects outside of music, including social history. As we'll see there is no small amount of compassion in his work, of social justice - he describes himself as 'always a man with a mission' - many of the understated themes on his diverse records are oblique attempts to give a voice to suppressed, unfairly treated or unnoticed peoples, and let them enjoy their place in the sun. In the same way, Parks - a devoted family man and church-goer - has not chosen an unerringly self-serving career path in music. Rather, he has attempted to use his position and his influence to help his fellow man wherever possible. He has served his music and ideas the best way he can, and treated with respect the many musicians he's worked with. 'While not everyone embraces all of his music,' says Donald Richardson, 'it seems that everyone he has personally worked with considers him a man of integrity, honesty, and intellect.'



MUSIC IS NOT NATURAL TO ME

EP Hearing the records that I've heard, as well as being great music, I feel that there's a history lesson, about certain aspects of America, being given in some of the texts and music. Is it your idea that the listener should go and research or investigate or find out further for themselves, if there's an intriguing story?

VDP I would hope that the records I do have more than simply musical merit. The talent that I have been given is noisome little. I sweat bullets when I write. Music is not natural to me. Most of my friends are far better equipped than I am to do what it is that's required to support a family. So music is more than an entertainment to me, it's a discipline, and it's a love. But it takes work - a lot of work. Still, I hope the records that I do have some other service than simply a musical entertainment. That they perhaps will agitate further exploration into my own obsessions.

I've found that some people would like to stop suffering, and write their symphony. I'm not such a person. I would probably continue to suffer, for having written what it is that I've written. Not proud about it, but I take delight in actual working. I have a work ethic, instilled by some very fine example in my parents. And I believe in that, the joy of work. It's a wonderful experience, I'm lucky to have the honour of working in music. And I believe I deserve it, at the age of 56! Almost 57!

About once every five years I go out and work on the confessional aspects - some people are prolific, and are prodigal, prodigious, and prophetic. I am really not. If I didn't have a deadline, I wouldn't come alive. I need a deadline, self-imposed or economically imposed, to

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come up with anything at all. But in the process I believe some creative things can happen, and all I need is the commission to get myself to that point.



SONG CYCLE

Released in 1967, and according to Jonathan Romney 'put the slammers on Parks' career as a commercial proposition'. Warner Brothers probably wanted a simple pop LP and got something quite indescribable, way ahead of its time, and very difficult to market. Ever since, Parks has maintained an uneasy relationship with his parent record company, even in his role as an executive there. It doesn't all come down to money, because what's at stake is good music: Parks takes the view (and it's hard to dispute) that a big corporate record company has something of a responsibility to use its money to promote and support good music. That should be its duty to the artists, and to the listeners; but instead (as we know) everyone is treated as just a way of making money. The artists are seen simply as producers of sellable units. We the public are seen as consumers who buy those units, not as people who actually might appreciate music.

Despite its relatively short length, *Song Cycle* is rich and condensed. It contains more ideas than you find in most double LPs - a dense fabric of music and texts. The astonishing sound is as lush as anything Martin Denny or Les Baxter ever dreamed of, with heavily echoed string sections reminiscent of the way many big-label classical records used to be produced in the 1950s. The music is a tightly-woven All-American quilt packed full of allusions and quotes from music's history, bringing in sources as diverse as Appalachian dulcimer music, Beethoven symphonies, Scott Joplin ragtime, Steven Foster, Charles Ives, and The Andrews Sisters. Besides all the sudden dynamics, seeming discordances resulting from two tunes being played on top of each other (very Charles Ives), we have the sparing but powerful use of sound effects such as bird song, train whistles, church bells and rainfall. As a listening experience, it's immensely rewarding - but its ever-shifting surface can frighten off the casual listener.

The *Song Cycle* lyrics demand no less. Comprising obtuse puns and labyrinthine wordplay condensed into miniature vignettes; each verse in the cycle renders in word as well as sound a tableau of American landscape as meticulously as any painter of the Hudson school. There are sumptuous visions of the 'amber waves of grain', fishing villages, churches, Hollywood as a desert, and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. Each song then proceeds to layer in highly perceptive political and social observations - some obscure, some very contemporary (for 1967) - generating themes within themes. Many of these episodes though, far from being fuelled by the same identikit political dogma typical of much 1960s 'protest' song (step forward, Jefferson Airplane), are far more personal. *Song Cycle* has Parks' own personal fears and phobias as the starting point; it is, he says, a record 'rife with trauma'.



EP Song Cycle...it really is one of my favourite records. It made quite an impression on me when I heard it. You've said somewhere else that you want to account for every single second in your music, that you like the idea of

music being a crossword puzzle, or a Chinese box, constructing something that will stand up to scrutiny.

VDP Actually, yes - I enjoy work that is thick with thought. I do enjoy that kind of design. Especially in miniaturists, which I consider myself to be. I work well with things of supreme unimportance, for example the song - to me, I treat it as an epic adventure. But I like the idea of inviting repeated study, that's something that I've always enjoyed to do. And *Song Cycle* is another case where it seems to me that I'd been somewhat distracted by the wars of our time. *Song Cycle* talked about - I remember writing a song called 'The Attic' about discovering my father's war chest. The thing in that was where I found the German luger he had liberated from a German officer. And the love letters - they call them love letters, but they describe the horrors of war. My father was in the first medical team, he headed the psychiatric medical team that liberated Dachau. A very dedicated man...he found a lot of people with a lot of problems, following the German atrocities. So - *Song Cycle* was touched by that idea, that I was in a generation that had a debt of honour to the generation before,

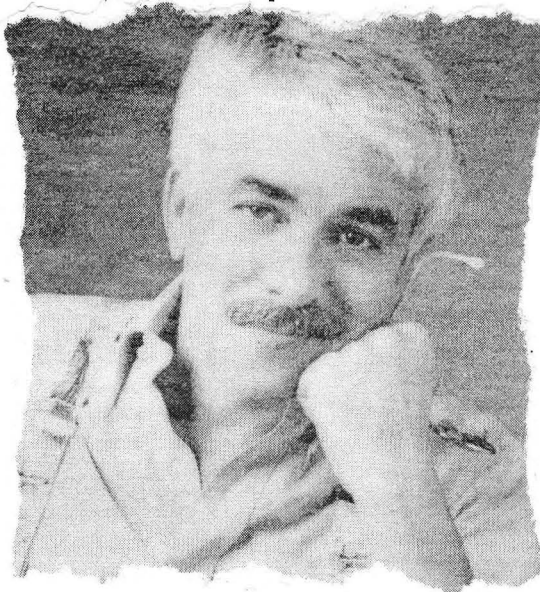
I signed a contract in January 1967 for that album, I was 22 years old. I had no idea what I would do, but I thought the most constructive thing that I could do would be to study my own origins. And try to reveal what my individual experience had taught or revealed to me, or at least to study it. And in the process of studying it - even in a free-relating fashion, as I did in *Song Cycle*, close on the heels of my obsession for James Joyce, I thought it might work. That I would be able to caterwaul my way through some free-relation in a musical effort. I experimented in that form with *Song Cycle*, and I think established a pattern of self-biography, which has continued to this day.

EP You make it sound like therapy, almost.

VDP Well it is, absolutely. Because I believe music-writing is tremendously self-examining, self-analytical, even unwittingly it is.

EP One hears rumours about Song Cycle. There's a rumour that it was an extremely expensive record to make.

VDP Well, it cost \$37,500. And that was after the correction for the artwork, which I understand was \$6,000. They went ahead and made a title for the record - they said *You Are Now Entering Van Dyke Parks*. That's what the art department thought up. It sounded like a bit of buggery to me, and I didn't want it! And I said, over my dead body! And I was the first person to reject an art department decision in the history of the company. [It] proved to be an anomaly for many other reasons at the company. None of which gets points at the corporation. I'm not too much of a corporate toad. Was the record too expensive? No. Was it notably expensive? No. But it did raise their ire, at the company, because they did not know how to sell it. Leonard Waronker the producer told me to do what I wanted to do, not to be worried about fitting into the mould at the time. It was post-Peter, Paul and Mary, the company was being carried by Dean Martin at the time, who was a real crooner. I was told not to worry about that. I did not have to be a crooner! I did not have to make my songs two minutes and 15 seconds long, with eight-bar introductions.



When you listen to a record, you're not listening to a person's work, you're listening to the residuals of a person's work. That's as close as you get. And that, I think, is as it should be. As a matter of fact, it is incumbent upon the communicator to remove any undesirable vestiges of hard labour, to try to come up with something seemingly effortless. That would be wonderful for me, someday I may have the opportunity to do it! I think if the commission's big enough, I could make real music out of it! I think *Song Cycle* did what it was supposed to do. It was an escape from freedom for me. I am at a 180-degree variance with people who look at that as something excessively self-indulgent. I do not agree! I think that the record is rife with trauma, trauma from the Kennedy assassination, trauma from the civil rights obsession I had, and the anti-war obsession I had, and the anti-materialistic obsession that I had. I was true to myself - I did what I could to be true to myself.

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And I was very sorry that they pulled the cheap shot about how much the record cost. When in fact - at \$37,500 - it didn't cost the record company a thing. I've been in the corporation, I've been in a record company's machinations, and I know that they don't pay a dime for their records. They write them off. The United States government has a tax system which is very clement to developing industries, and record companies have abused its - what I think is a public obligation to come up with music which expresses a variety of healthy pursuits and styles.

And they're still not selling *Song Cycle* [after] thirty years. I'm being euphemistic. They are selling it very well - it's still in the catalogue. Now there's a reason that it's in the catalogue. But when they cut it out, as they did *Discover America* and *Clang Of The Yankee Reaper*, I just chose a few, because I had a handshake with Mo Austen. I had done *Discover America*, for example, with no contract. That one cost a hundred thousand. I was in a meeting one day and the head of the record company said 'Do we have any paper on this?', and the attorney looked up and said 'No we don't.' They had nothing on me!



PHIL OCHS

Van Dyke Parks, happy in his role as the 'man behind the curtain', has worked with a significant number of excellent American songsters in the fields of pop and rock music, as arranger and composer alike. A checklist of these provides an impressive CV which includes The Byrds, Ry Cooder, Tim Buckley and The Beach Boys. Without wanting to rattle them all off again, I call attention to my personal favourites - the first LP by Randy Newman (REPRISE RS 6286), which nobody ever buys or even talks about. It boasts simple, poignant orchestral arrangements by Parks which occasionally replace or supplement the usual piano orchestrations that Newman favours. These aren't I suppose Newman's most memorable songs ever (his satirical canine incisors had not yet pushed aside his sentimental milk teeth), but as a listening experience this is simply gorgeous. Newman remained a close friend, and gave Parks the 'Vine Street' song for *Song Cycle*.

Phil Ochs grew out of the Greenwich Village protest folk song movement to become an uncompromising spokesman for American radicalism - doing it in a series of exceptional records which have been praised by radical

Ed Sanders. After he'd made a number of acoustic LPs, he opted to eschew the singer and acoustic guitar sound to go down a lush orchestral arrangement path which ended in such bittersweet masterpieces as *Pleasures of the Harbour* for A&M Records. Before this however he called in his friend Parks to work on *Tape From California* and *Phil Ochs' Greatest Hits*. The former LP, in amidst the more outspoken rallying-cries like 'The War Is Over', conceals one of Ochs' most personal and moving songs. Called 'Half a Century High', it features Parks on the harpsichord and a very unusual arrangement - for the first verse Ochs sings through a distortion effect that sounds like he's making a phone call from the moon, against the sound effect of a babbling brook. When the instruments fade in, the listener experiences a mini-epiphany that matches perfectly the personal revelation that the singer is going through, as he has emotional maturity thrust upon him by the cruel world, and grows to be 'Half a Century High' in spite of his tender years. A tiny masterpiece of poetry and record production which I recommend.



VDP Do you know what a maverick is? A maverick is something without a brand. I think it is appropriate to say that I am a maverick. Because I'm not branded, any more than Phil [Ochs] was. The difference between Phil and me, aside from some real talent, and Phil had real talent, is that I am alive to celebrate him. I was called one of the producers on *Greatest Hits*. They called me a producer. I don't know what a producer is! I still don't know. But all I know, it was an honour to work for Phil Ochs.

EP I always felt that you were kindred spirits with him.

VDP Absolutely. On one of those records, he called me a 'Hero of the Revolution'. You know that, don't you? I was the only guy in Los Angeles to have the Zapruder film. The Zapruder film was a highly coveted piece of arcana from the 60s, when John Kennedy was shot. It's one piece of photographic evidence that existed. And I had a copy of it. It was illegal to own it. The FBI had tapped my phone. It became a habit for us - I had it copied, so that we could all sit there to observe the film. We would look at the film frame by frame, and try to undo what was incontrovertible, and try to bring the President back to life. And study what it was that had happened to us, and to the dream of democratisation and meritocracy that John Kennedy had in mind for the United States. I'm a firm believer in meritocracy. That's what brought Phil and I together.

I met Phil in 1964, in Cambridge Massachusetts. In Club 47 I met Phil Ochs, right at the end of that folk-mania, before 12 by 5 and all the electrification that, [along with] The Beatles and so forth, had changed the course of the protest singers. So that's when I met Phil, and then by the time he came to California, I was already a bottom-feeder, elaborating on other peoples' works, and very happy being the man behind the curtain. And Phil Ochs used that, I think to no great advantage. I personally preferred Phil Ochs' works that were just guitar and voice, I loved Phil Ochs' songs. But Phil was an absurdist, and I think that it was absurd for him to have strings and things in his efforts. It was over the top, unnecessary. I didn't think it was necessary to gild his lily. I thought he was beautiful by himself. But Phil went through a great deal of frustrations after he castigated Bob Dylan for going electric at Newport, and Phil lost...you see Bob Dylan, he wanted to be Phil Ochs, but he wasn't Phil Ochs. He wasn't in Phil Ochs' league. And that killed Phil Ochs, it just killed him. Because - Phil found out life is not fair. And as everyone else kind of bought in to the dumbing of America, and the comfy chair, and 'America Inc', Phil Ochs was one of the last dissenters. It was a rage - he raged. He went out alone, and I think terribly distressed about his dashed expectations for the country he loved so much.

EP I think that's the difference between him and Bob Dylan. I feel Bob Dylan gave his audience rather easy answers, that made them feel comfortable, and Phil Ochs did exactly the opposite.

VDP Exactly, but that doesn't mean that Bob Dylan is evil. But his mercantile [skills]...he's a savvy guy, he's a merchant. And he had a commercial acumen that brought him to a broader listenership, that was less challenged by what they came to hear.

Morality is a big thing here. We have Bill Clinton posing as a liberal, and vulgarising the office of the Presidency in such a way. There's just no time for sergeants in my book. There's some very important questions now, about the impact of globalism. If the question can't be

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put in usual reportage - Disney owns ABC News in the United States, they own the News service. So that of course somehow corrupts the reportage of any Disney adventures, whether it's a movie review, or a commentary on Euro-Disney, and these questions of globalism are deep and unsettling to me. For the abrogation of a national identity to a corporate multinational identity is very troublesome to me.

Recently in Seattle these questions were raised by common people who came together - and as they say, politics makes strange bedfellows - from anarchists and absurdists, to union members rank and file, intelligentsia and so forth. And they all came there to protest the economic or ecological sensibility - or advisability of this GAP treaty run amok. All I can tell you is - and the blood was let on the streets of Seattle - Phil Ochs would have been there, and he would have been protesting, and he was not fashionable, but he had an enquiring mind and a discerning heart. And he was not corrupted. Which isn't to say he didn't share something with all of us; that he was corruptible, of course, was always a question, and he was tested in that many times. But I had the greatest respect for him as a person.



DISCOVER AMERICA THROUGH CALYPSO MUSIC

The *Discover America* LP was released in 1971. A total change from *Song Cycle*, the first noticeable difference being in the sound, quite unlike the lush orchestrations of *Song Cycle*, here was a far more natural recording. The LP comprises cover versions of Calypso songs, and steelband instrumentals, indigenous music of the West Indies - islands which for a long time were part of the British Empire, until they came under American rule. J. D. Elder identified the traits of Calypso as including 'the topicality, its tendency to satirize upon every conceivable subject, its allusion and open picing, and its double entendre.' Allusion, satire and word-play - how could Parks resist? Singers such as The Lion, The Tiger, Atilla The Hun, Lord Invader and others would use the form of the song like a daily newspaper - setting down their views and opinions on 'just about anything they were thinking about', from the abdication of Edward VIII, to a discussion of the Louis-Schmeling boxing match. The Lion was especially fond of celebrating the talents of his favourite American singers from movies and phonograph records, which he did in his charming songs 'The Four Mills Brothers' and 'Bing Crosby'.

The song 'FDR in Trinidad' was originally a rather ironical Calypso comment by Atilla The Hun (Raymond Quevedo) on the visit by the President of the United States to Trinidad in 1936. 'There's a twist to it, obviously, in the last verse where he talks about making the world a safe place for humanity,' says Ry Cooder, who also covered the song on his second LP. 'I think that was an optimistic time. They were really excited about the fact that

Roosevelt went down there...but the guy who wrote it must have had some ideas about politicians.' Parks was no exception. His arrangement of the song goes one further; the mocking laughter of the chorus closing and ending the song, the acerbic guitar lines of Lowell George, the near-absurdist arrangement, and his own balmy vocal all convey the scepticism of a man who has seen the death of JFK and LBJ's handling of Vietnam. Released in 1971, this song is eerily prescient of the Watergate chaos that's just around the corner.

A lot of the Calypso songs on *Discover America* were

originally recorded by Trinidadians who travelled to New York, just before the war years, and were compiled onto various Folkways LPs by Sam Charters in the 1950s and 1960s. Parks knew these Folkways records well and chose to pay his lasting tribute to the music - and indeed the musicians, some of whom he got to know well on his trips to the Caribbean. He even secured a deal for one of the singers, The Mighty Sparrow, and arranged a record for him at Warner Brothers in the early 1970s - and soon did the same for the Esso Trinidad Steel Band. Parks was striving to do the decent thing for the Trinidadians - Donald A Richardson reports: 'Part of his effort at this time was to gain royalty and copyright authority to these musicians who were not compensated or protected by ASCAP or BMI.'

For *Discover America*, Parks came up with some of the wildest string arrangements yet heard - the dynamics simply defy gravity and often leave the listener bewildered. Although it has to be said, the original band arrangements on the Calypso records that inspired him are just as skewed - in particular, listen to the song 'G-Man Hoover' in its original form by Sir Lancelot. There is a

genuine steel band, and excellent use of the marimba to double the melody on 'John Jones' and 'Occapella'. Parks brought in Lowell George and Little Feat from the Reprise label to add a superb Southern rock backdrop on tracks like 'Your Own Comes First'. He translated the lilting rhythms of Calypso into a near-classical string arrangement for 'The Four Mills Brothers', re-inscribing the song's ephemeral qualities into something more durable, without sacrificing one iota of the charm. On a grander scale, he had already remade 'Out on the Rollin' Sea Where Jesus Speak to Me' into a mini-symphonic classic. This was based on the singing of the Bahamian guitarist Joseph Spence, and it's almost as though the inspired Parks had made a pop-song equivalent of an illuminated manuscript out of this simple tune.



EP I recently came across this Folkways Calypso record, which has some of the same songs which you performed on there. It was quite a revelation to me. What an extraordinary thing for you to do, to make an LP of Calypso music?



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VDP Well I had this LP when I was a kid! And I loved it. And there were different reasons I did these songs, but I just decided to simplify my life to some degree by going here first and celebrating these people. I went down and met some of these writers in Trinidad. I sent them a typewriter but it was stolen at Customs. They needed a typewriter at the Calypso Society. The Four Mills Brothers - by the time they did my brother's song called 'Cab Driver' there were only three of them, but I loved the Mills Brothers. And I just was fascinated by the Trinidadians' talents and insight and political commentary in song. Same thing that you find in music that expresses a political point of view that escapes the attention of the censorial governmental authorities, the authoritarian regimes that repress such things as freedom of thought. It happened in Ireland. Good music, lyrics and so forth came to underscore the foment of political unrest. Humpty Dumpty has even taken a fall in the course of seeming juvenilia of political commentary in song. I tried to do it with *Jump!*, with the Bre'r Rabbit material. So there's a commonality here. My love for Calypso - for what it does, its rapacious wit, you know. This Folkways LP was a beautiful record, I must say. I don't even possess it any more. I went further of course, and I met up with Calypsonians. The Mighty Sparrow - I did a record for him, and I met Lord Kitchener and Calypso Rose. I did one of Calypso Rose's songs for Bonnie Raitt.

EP You mentioned something about Calypso form in your concert, which sounded very interesting. If I've remembered it correctly it was connected to [Trinidad] being a British Colony, which absorbed some British influence...

VDP Well I find that generally to be true that every place the British have been - all those evil British people! - they have taken their idea of Parliament, and with the leavening of monarchism - which by the way, is offensive to me. I must say that I'm happy to be where I am! Because I've been subjected to the arrogance of inherited wealth from other people, because I didn't have enough money. I see that at parties here, and that is repugnant to me. And it's still a toy, love is treated just like a toy here by the aristocracy. And we don't have that in the United States. But still when you go where the British have been, if you have been where the Portuguese have been, or where the French have been, look at Haiti, bleeding into the sea. Look at the ecological residue of French colonialism. Or Vietnam. The French have known how to turn coat and run, and leave us with some real big problems, whereas the British have left with a sense of circumspection, and having made a real contribution to a humanistic government, and some efflorescence of popular art. As in the case of Trinidad.



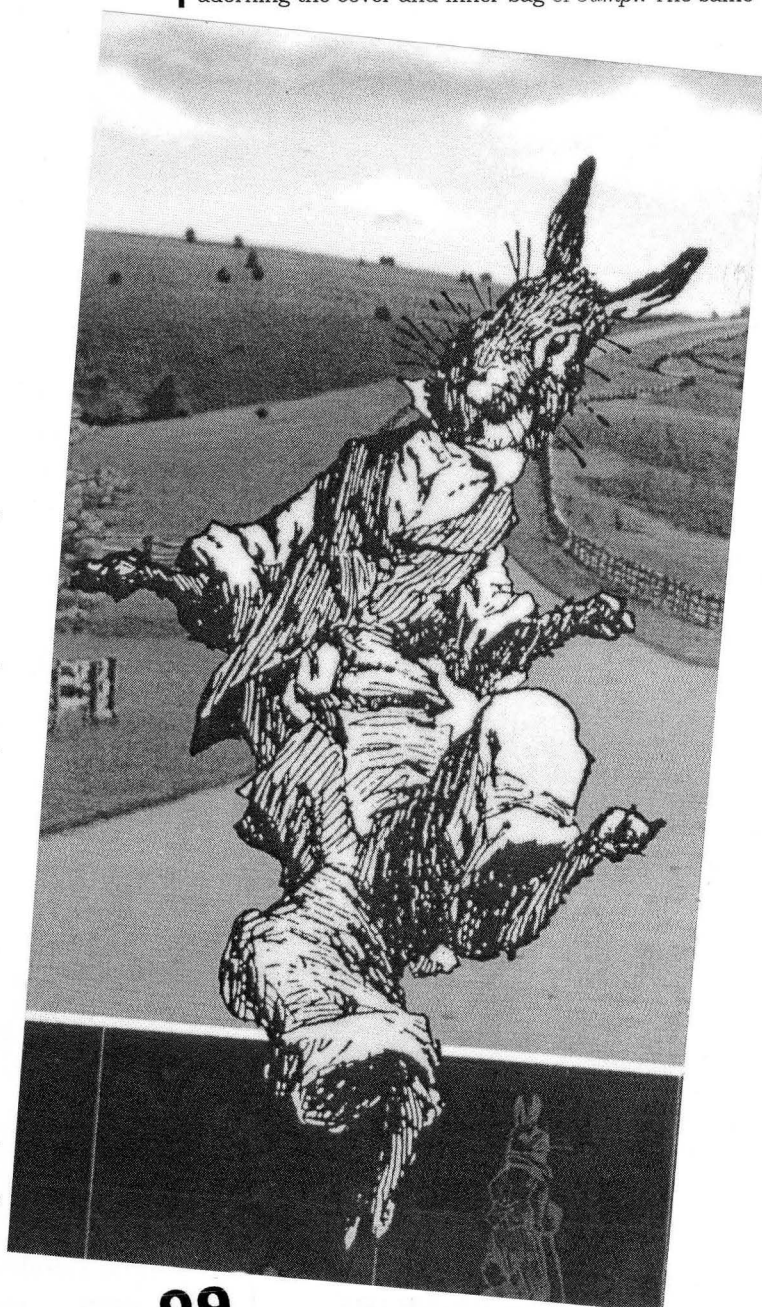
JUMP! AND RACIAL IRREPROACHABILITY

The LP record *Jump!*, although completed by early 1983, was not released by Warners for another year. This was another new idea, a fully-fledged concept LP quite different from the themes which had proceeded it. At first listen this appeared to be one of Parks' most listenable and approachable projects. The set of nine songs - and two instrumentals - sounded like show tunes, near-pastiches of hits that never existed from an imaginary history of Broadway. From the curtain-raiser opening track 'Jump!', which never fails to get the adrenaline racing, through foot-tapping, hummable and danceable tunes such as 'Opportunity for Two', 'Come Along', 'Many a Mile to Go' and 'Hominy Grove', Parks added his voice to a small troupe of singers, including the excellent Kathy Dalton, and deployed

(with the help of Lennie Niehaus) all his arranging skills with a mini-orchestra including strings, harps, banjos, mandolin, cymbalom, steel drum and two harmonicas. It's an immaculate record, with his brightest-ever production sound.

Despite this glossy show tune surface however, the narrative theme to *Jump!* is something that Busby Berkeley probably would never have dreamed of. It's based on the Bre'r Rabbit cycle of stories, first collected and set into prose by Joel Chandler Harris, the late 19th century American writer. The work is highly prized by Mark Twain as an important piece of American folklore. Harris gathered oral-tradition tales from negro slaves in America, in much the same way as Cecil Sharp or Baring-Gould collected folk songs in the United Kingdom. But the tales had existed in America for at least 100 years before Harris wrote them down. Taken as a collection, these stories defy narrative logic in the same playful way as a Roadrunner cartoon - Bre'r Fox (the principal adversary) can be killed off as many times as is expedient, only to surface alive and scheming in the next tale.

Parks' interest in these tales was manifold. Firstly, a love of books plain and simple. He loved the original illustrations by A B Frost so much that he had them adorning the cover and inner bag of *Jump!*. The same



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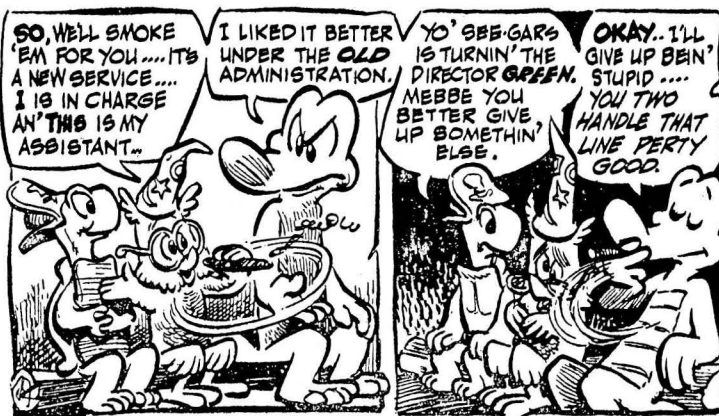
pictures were used as blowups for a promotional live performance of the LP in New York. He dedicated the *Jump!* LP to his mother who taught him how to read, and read the same stories to his own children. This literary passion recently culminated in Parks' own adaptations of the Brer Rabbit books, published by Harcourt Brace in three parts, with new watercolour illos and back.

In these books he was proudest of his decision to remove the Uncle Remus storyteller character - quite an achievement, when you consider this is about the only character most people remember, thanks to Walt Disney's 1946 movie *Song of the South*. Parks' view is that Remus was merely added (by Harris) as a narrative distancing device, to sweeten the deal in 'selling' these stories to the readers. In fact, the tales were of great importance to the negroes, part of a 'survival mechanism' as Parks sees it. Their structural origins lay in Africa, not in America; and the way Brer Rabbit always comes out a winner indicates their cultural necessity to the survival of a race kept in subjugation.

I suggest that Parks strives to give voice to this subjugated race in *Jump!* - and his mission is to reaffirm the black man at the centre of the Brer Rabbit myth. All the songs' lyrics (written by Parks, with Martin Fyodr Kibbee and Terry Gilkyson) are phonetically rendered in 'darkie' speech - this is not a patronising racist slur, but an attempt to reclaim the original stories away from Harris and put their words back in the mouths of those who originally spoke them. This phonetic rendering may have been inspired by Walt Kelly's Pogo comic strip, of which I guess Parks may have been a fan. (Walt Kelly is namechecked on the original sleeve to *Song Cycle*) The animal characters, all swamp-dwellers of the Okefenokee in the deep South of America, all had their gorgeous southern accents and speech patterns lovingly captured in prose (and lettering) by the masterful Kelly.

In 1984 Parks gave a performance of *Jump!* at The Bottom Line in New York, to promote the release. On a bootleg tape which survives, there's evidence of his spoken presentation which hints at further idiosyncratic interpretations of the texts; before playing 'Invitation to Sin' (in which Brer Rabbit is on the point of being seduced by Miss Meadows) he describes the scene as only he can: 'In the opiated ether, with a nude descending a spiral staircase, with chandeliers strung with lighting buds and opulence, an idol of agrarian reform beckons the modern man'.

Jump! was intended to have been developed as a stage show - a spectacular one, by the sound of it, matched only The Residents and their performance of the 'Black Barry' segment of *Cube-E*. The talent was assembled from Parks' friends in theatre and television, but fatal tragedy struck at the last minute. Out of respect to the families of the survivors, Parks chose not to proceed with the project.



did all of my records for a year, so they could write it off. They treated me as a bad debt throughout my career. It hurt my feelings, yes. Of course it hurt my feelings.

Somebody told me that *Jump!* would make a good musical, and it was a fellow by the name of Timothy Mayor. I met him at Harvard - he was a director, who had done a play by Bertolt Brecht called *Mother Courage*, and he wanted it to be musicalised - so I did musicalise it. It was with

Linda Hunt and Brian Doyle Murray, a wonderful production from the Boston Shakespeare Theatre. And I went there and met Tim Mayor, who had a Broadway smash at the time - he had made a musical of Gershwin tunes that were not from musicals and put them together in his own dramatic soufflé. It was called *My One And Only* - it was with Twigg. And she'd put on enough weight to be able to carry the part, and it was a big success. And so Tim Mayor, having got his foot in the door at Broadway, in a very constructive way, wanted to write a book - that's what they call the script for the musical. Tim was very talented - for example, in one song, he got it where the baby rabbit dies and the father rabbit - I wanted a big deal with that concept of being pre-deceased. Because my own parents had been by, with my brother. I wanted to study that in the Brer Rabbit, when I read in one of these stories that his children were so hungry that one of them died. You may remember in *Angela's Ashes* recently - it was common for a little Irish boy to wake up, a generation ago, and find one of his siblings dead in the same bed. Things like that happen. And I know what hunger is - it doesn't show any more, but I've been hungry and I know what it is. I'm familiar with it, and I thought I would deal with it. So I did, and in a song called 'Many A Mile' - I wrote about this little rabbit dying, and Timothy Mayor had the vision - the dramatic resources to bring the kid out of the father's arms by the hearth in his ascension, on a cloud to the heavens, where a black angel in a golden chariot rides by and takes him off the cloud into the sky, as the choir with their robes lengthening are raised on pneumatic stanchions. End of Act One, with the kid going to heaven. So Michael O'Donoghue, from *Saturday Night Live*, a scatological fella - I thought would be great for the dialogue value, because [he's] a very funny man. So Tim and Michael set off to make a musical of *Jump!* and Tim died of cancer, and about six months later Michael had an aneurysm and died. And I was not ready to go ahead with that musical over their dead bodies. So that's what happened to *Jump!*, I just didn't want to pursue it. But I'll tell you this, it's a great story, I do believe that, when I cite Mark Twain as saying it's our most important piece of stolen goods. Folklore value. When I go somewhere I go to its folklore to find what is in its heart. But I decided to do it without the apologetic, avuncular sage, the apologetic negro. I took the negro out, because I wanted not to anaesthetise the project. That slave negro was not a necessary ingredient, nor was it part of the original stories which were brought from Africa with the Golla culture in the South - Carolina and the Georgia Islands.

EP Do you feel you were reclaiming something quite important in doing this?

VDP Well no. I don't think so. It's too bad. I really misfired on the project. It didn't jump, it loped, and it loped nowhere. But I still approve of the project, but if I were to do it I would start from scratch, I would come up with a different currency of music, and a different time. I have written down a through-line, that I think is a worthy exploitation of these tales. And codifying them as a single expository adventure. And the challenge has been vast, because there is no exposition in the tales of Brer Rabbit. There's no sense of starting at point A and ending at point Z. By the time one anecdote is finished, and Brer Wolf is killed, Brer Wolf appears in the next story. So it's hard to put this quilt-work together into a single fabric. And I think that there are many ways that it could be done. I lived for years with this book as if it were a bible. Every day reading from it, for the pleasure of my young children.

When I put out the record, a man in St Petersburg Florida, who was the head book-reviewer for the *St Petersburg Times*, he reviewed the record, and I went ahead with him, Malcolm Jones, and adapted the

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first book for Harcourt Brace. I did three books, and that I think serviced my defence of this material. You know the word 'bowdler'. Bowdlerism, to me, is *Aida* in the hands of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Bowdlerism is 'Schubert's finished symphony' in the hands of Andrew Lloyd Webber. Bowdlerism is an offensive thing to me. I've always been very wary of censorship in any form. I know how offended I was by it, and for good reason. So when I came to parenthood, and wanted to return to the tales of Brer Rabbit, and found their unavailability for the expediency of political correctness, and the embarrassment of the slave in the picture, I was angry that the books were unavailable in the public libraries, considering what Twain himself had said, that they were the most important piece of American folklore. But then again Twain himself was being pulled off the library shelves. So by now I had a healthy animus, an anger, driving and fuelling my resolve to comment on this gaucherie, because there might be something in it. And what was in it was the fact, the realisation, as my relationship to the material deepened and my affection for its unknown authorship became more intimate, I realised that it was the survival mechanism for blacks in the American South. And part of the way to expiate my own complications of having been born in Mississippi, it was a very refreshing and often painful process of discovery. So right at the time that I found that the books were threatened as an available resource for childhood experience, I went ahead and defended the idea and got interest from a great publisher, and the first book was deemed 'racially irreproachable'. And that was a career decision. I can remember how much it meant to me to exclude Uncle Remus, who had been made so popular by Disney. So I went through a lot to get there.



WAR IS HELL

EP I've done a bit of research into Tokyo Rose. It's a very interesting story, which I thought was quite extraordinary. Because she was given this show trial, because she was broadcasting propaganda during the Second World War; that she was something of a victim, because she was of American-Japanese heritage.

VDP Yes, she was a victim of course. Yes, *Tokyo Rose* was a very interesting episode in my life. Because I was living as a bachelor, between marriages, with a male heir of General Jonathan Wainwright. They called him 'Skinny'...Skinny didn't weigh too much when they found him liberated by Douglas MacArthur, our Pacific theatre commander. And they found him in the Philippines, after the famous death marches. Which basically revealed the Japanese to be of stone-age mentality when it came to the humanities. They drove their tanks over soldiers who were too tired to walk to their next assignment as prisoners of war. [That's] the Japanese, characterised, in my view - in a tremendously prejudicial or accurate way, depending on the person you might ask. And as the Japanese were coming into economic power, what they called the bubble economy, and they were buying a lot of the real estate, about 40 per cent of the real estate of downtown Los Angeles. As well as Rockefeller Centre in New York, which they bought - they bought the Crown jewels! A lot of urban American architecture. And I was very concerned by this land-grab. Because it just suggested...it brought up my remembrances of General MacArthur's friend, Jonathan Wainwright, and his letters to his family. Those letters which I read, describing the bestiality of the Japanese toward the American prisoners of war. So I tried to exorcise my own demons when I did *Tokyo Rose*, and I tried to make a joke out of my real crisis - sense of crisis - [my] foreboding about the new Japanese empowerment. And that's what happened in *Tokyo Rose*, and it has been analysed in a most didactic - and some people would say dry, academic fashion - by a Dr Philip Hayward of MacQuarrie University of Sydney, Australia. He's a musicologist, and he's written a book called *Widening The Horizon*. *Widening The Horizon* is a book which explores - Dr Hayward says (!) - orientalism and exoticism in popular music. And I'm right up there with Martin Denny! So it's very interesting to come out with a record that really is from the heart, as an object of curiosity to an academician.



FOLK OF THE UK

In 1999 I went to the Royal Festival Hall to see a massive show organised by the American producer and entrepreneur, Hal Willner. It was a tribute to Harry Smith, the artist, film-maker, scholar and collector who had, during his amazing career, also found time to put together

the Anthology of American Folk Music which was released as a six-LP set by Folkways in the 1950s. The show at the RFH was a tribute to this, and featured a galaxy of musicians and singers all paying their homage by rendering their versions of songs from the set. Without wishing to dwell on the ups and downs of the musical merits of the evening - the stage was crowded with the sorts of names that give *Mojo* readers a wet dream - I was glad to see Van Dyke Parks on stage here for the first time. He was worked with Willner before, most memorably on the *Lost In The Stars* LP where, through his tasty string arrangements a couple tracks, he reminded us of Kurt Weill's Broadway career.

A spontaneous decision to accompany Liza Carthy on the piano brought forth an unexpected result. Parks in fact is keenly aware of the roots of folk music and is proud of the 'Celtic marrow' in his bones. He sang 'Summer Is Icumen In' at school, and one of his early singles (also covered by Donovan) is a traditional folk song, 'Black is the Colour'.



VDP I did one arrangement for Eliza Carthy. Being from a folk family, I feel very fortunate to have been able to work for her. She's about ready to do her first Warner Brothers Ltd album to try to broaden her fan-base. Right now she's given no quarter to what her own convictions are about the preservation and invigoration of folk music and its referential values, with her father Martin Carthy and her mother Norma Waterstone. So I did one string arrangement - a string quartet, the Mondrian string quartet down in Brighton. And it was enough to her satisfaction that she invited me back to work on another one, and that's what I'm going to do on Monday at the George Martin studio. I'm so excited to be hanging around where Mr Martin is - I so respect his work. And to be part of Eliza's convulsion from the knowledge of the folk idioms that excite the druid marrow in my bones. And I have it! She matters to me as a very precious person and I hope that I can serve her, better than I serviced Phil Ochs. I hope I've learned more.

EP So it was quite spontaneous that you started playing the piano with her on stage. My friend said you became, for a moment, Percy Grainger.

VDP That would be nice, I wish I were in Percy Grainger's league. He's a real musician, I'm telling ya - that record *In A Nutshell*, with Simon Rattle, it was one of my favourite records. It is what these music reviewers like to call 'indispensable'. It is necessary, it is a must-have - for anybody who wants to feel proud he is British, this is it. This record is great! And it is a wind orchestra, it's just so subtle, and so beautiful. When war was a more civilised adventure, they stopped [fighting] for a performance, and I imagine this is before nerve gasses became standard operating procedure. But the MO of the general schematic [was] they stopped for music, and they played music, and they played it with portable instruments. And those were usually band instruments. And Percy Grainger was part of that process. This is World War One. Because when the Americans came back from World War One, the Doughboys, they were singing 'Danny Boy' - that's what popularised Grainger. That was his big hit! He published 'Danny Boy' as a lyrical arrangement, for piano, and 'Country Garden' was not far on its heels. So Grainger had a big commercial success. And also his music is astonishing to play, wonderful, because he doesn't hide behind language to get his instructions felt - 'As fast as possible'. If you look at some of Grainger's piano work, and you see what he does when he takes a sweep of the finger to the highest note on the piano - it's so much fun to just figure Grainger out! And he's got a lot of osseas, writing simpler parts for those who can't keep up with his technique, because he was a consummate pianist. His music is just superb. So this *In A Nutshell* - in a nutshell - actually displays Percy Grainger at his best. An Australian native who represents all the best that there is of Empire, gone from this world, in things. I recommend that! And brutal harmonic convolutions! The guy goes through some ruggedly acerbic harmonic testiness, and amazing logic. Grainger is in the big time. And speaking of just British folk music, and how much it means to me, because I'm embarking on a folk record right now, myself, to just do it. It's being supported and commissioned by Warner Japan. I'm working on some things that come from these shores, to try to study my own bloodlines. And this Grainger meant a lot to me, and another person that meant a lot to me was this William Chappell. You know his story? William Chappell's father made a lot of money - this all kind of ties in, it's funny how things come together with age. The

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work of William Chappell was very interesting to me, because William Chappell's father was a successful industrialist in England. His son William found himself with this large amount of money, and a man of position who understood that with privilege comes responsibility. And he realised that the Industrial age was wiping out the folk traditions, and while it was still possible to make some written record of what these bards were singing - you know, when people used to stay up for days, and listen to a story? - he would follow those harpists from village to village, and he would write this stuff down! And not only did he do that - in a book called *Popular Music Of The Olden Time*, with its archaic spelling, a two volume book - took us, for example, from how much Henry VIII was paying a piper, and what kind of instrument - took us through the golden age of the madrigal and so forth, all the way to the 19th century. This one man, William Chappell, produced these books which, had he not done that, would have left us a lot poorer.



CONCLUSION

VDP All of these wondrous stories about folk music at its apogee, and also at the moment of its sudden decline, because I'm interested in decadence. I mean I like to study things that have a terminal nature, those things take an urgency of purpose. And I turned to them into my work, like I did with Calypso. Always a man with a mission, and somehow mission aborted - I don't always feel so powerful in the way I dealt with these things, but what's there in the records that I've done is a sense of dedication to things that are passing from our view. Or field of vision, or sound.

So this Carthy thing - you know, 'Man Proposes, God Disposes'. You never know why you're doing something. And I don't figure things out, I have no concept when I start. I just start to work. In this case, I came to England having been offered to come back to the Royal Festival Hall, by this man David Sefton. I just didn't think anything of it, I don't count my chickens till they hatch. And at the same point Eliza Carthy said I could do some arranging for her. And this I hope will have some lasting value. And service my real interest in the continuity that the Carthy-Watson clans represent. And for me to have the privilege of being involved in that is really a very deep and thrilling moment for me, so I found a reason to be here! It's marvellous, isn't it? It's perfect! I can't wait to hear it. White-knuckle, all the way. Always is.



DISCOGRAPHY

Come To The Sunshine / Farther Along (Hopi Indians) single

MGM T-9982/13570 (1966)

Number Nine / Do What You Wanta single

MGM 1301 / MGM K-13441 (1966)

Song Cycle LP

WARNER BROS 1727 (1968)

Donovan's Colours (Part 1) / Donovan's Colours (Part 2) single

(Released under the name George Washington Brown)

[WARNER BROS] (1968)

The Eagle And Me / Out On The Rolling Sea (When Jesus Speak To Me) single

WARNER BROS 7409 (1969)

Discover America LP

WARNER BROS 2589 (1972)

Occapella / Ode To Tobago single

WARNER BROS 7609 (1972)

Clang of the Yankee Reaper LP

WARNER BROS 2878 (1975)

Jump! LP

WARNER BROS 923829 1 (1984)

Tokyo Rose LP

WARNER BROS 925968 1 (1989)

Idiosyncratic Path: The Best of Van Dyke Parks CD

DIABLO 807 (1994)

Orange Crate Art (with Brian Wilson) CD

WARNER BROS 9 45427-2 (1995)

BIO

1943: Born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi

1952: Sent to the American Boychoir School (formerly the Columbus Boy Choir) in Princeton, New Jersey. ('I went there, and sang under Toscanini. He took my hand and took me for a bow at Carnegie Hall.')

First studied clarinet ('I was always the first chair clarinetist, so I wanted to be a clarinetist for a living, but I wasn't good enough when I got to Hollywood. I couldn't double on the instruments, I didn't play flute and so forth. I was not big enough for the big pond')

Spent two years at Public School, and studied piano at Carnegie Inst, where he went on to major in music, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1960-1963.

'Folk music brought me back and I found my serious interest in music when I left the academic environment.'

1964: first record contract with MGM.

1966: Signed with Warner Brothers.

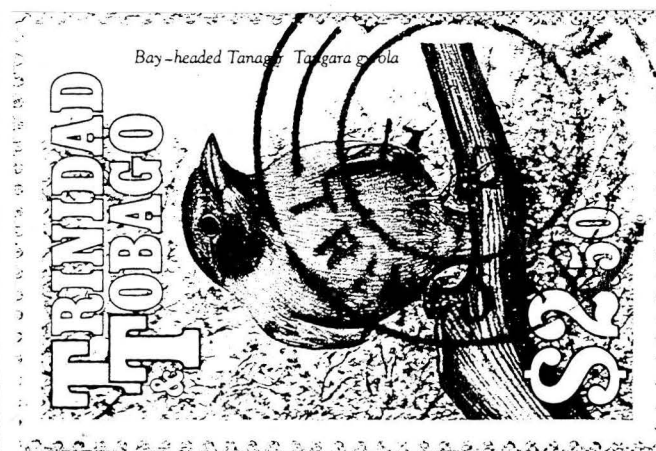


Of interest:

VDP's work as an arranger is far too voluminous to list here.

The Beach Boys

Parks worked as a lyricist on the unreleased *Smile* LP before signing to Warner Brothers in 1966. The *Smile* story is well documented in *Look! Listen! Vibrate! Smile!* compiled by Domenic Priore.



Calypso

The Real Calypso LP, FOLKWAYS RBF 13.

Esso Trinidad Steel Band, WARNERS WS 1917.

Joseph Spence, *Good Morning Mr Walker* LP, ARHOOLIE 1061

John H Cowley, *Carnival, Canboulay and Calypso*. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS 1996

Cowley also did the sleeve notes for two excellent comps on Rounder Records:

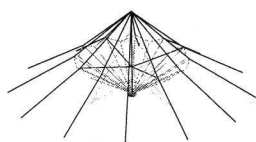
Fall of Man: Calypsos on the Human Condition 1935-1941, ROUNDER CD 1141

Roosevelt in Trinidad: Calypsos of Events, Places and Personalities 1933-1939, ROUNDER CD 1142.



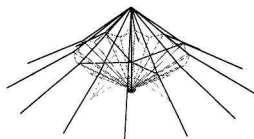
DISINFORMATION PROUDLY PRESENTS

THE NEGATIVES OF LIGHTNING



DESCRIPTIVE PROSPECTUS FOR A SPECIAL COMMEMORATIVE
JEWELLERY COLLECTION, ISSUED ON THE FIRST DAY OF
THE THIRD MILLENNIUM ~ THE "NEGATIVES OF LIGHTNING" ~
A UNIQUE COLLECTION OF DECORATIVE ARTEFACTS MADE BY
LIGHTNING STRIKES AND ATOMIC EXPLOSIONS

↯ J.C. BANKS, 1ST OF JANUARY 2000 ↯



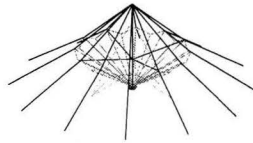
“THE FIRST ‘DISINFORMATION’ TRACK WAS A SIMPLE ANALOGUE CASSETTE RECORDING OF LONGWAVE RADIO SIGNALS RADIATED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES DURING A VERY CLOSE ELECTRICAL STORM. THESE CLUSTERED SURGES WERE, FROM THE POINT OF THE VIEW OF THE RECORDING EQUIPMENT, INFINITELY LOUD AND ARBITRARILY SHORT. ALL THAT WAS REQUIRED WAS TO SUPPRESS AN INSTINCT TO PROTECT THE RECEIVER FROM THESE BRUTAL SIGNALS. THE SOUND OF THIS TRACK (WAS) DESCRIBED BY ‘VITAL’ MAGAZINE AS ‘LIKE THE END OF A RECORD BEING SLOWLY GROUND UP BY A BLUNT SPIKE’.

THUNDER IS CROSS-CULTURALLY IDENTIFIED AS ‘THEOPHANY’ ~ THE VOICE OF GOD, AND LIGHTNING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DIVINE INTERVENTION. THE ANCIENT ROMANS PROTECTED AND CONSECRATED POINTS OF LIGHTNING IMPACT AS ‘PUTEAL’, NOW KNOWN TO ARCHÆOLOGISTS AND GEOPHYSICISTS ALIKE AS THE SOURCE OF FULGURITES ~ SUBTERRANEAN WANDS COMPOSED OF EARTH, SAND, AND STONES FUSED INTO GROTESQUELY TWISTED OBSIDIAN WANDS BY THE PASSAGE OF LIGHTNING STRIKES INTO AND THROUGH THE EARTH ITSELF. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF THIS CONCEPT CONTRAST WITH THE FEW, EXTRAORDINARY, EXISTING ARTWORKS WHICH RELATE DIRECTLY TO ATMOSPHERIC ELECTRICAL PHENOMENA ~ THE PAINTINGS OF JOHN AND JONATHAN MARTIN, COMPOSER JOHN TAVENER’S ‘THEOPHANY’ AND SCULPTOR CORNELIA PARKER’S ‘MASS: COLDER, DARKER, MATTER’ [1]. FOR CONVENIENCE OF COMPARISON TAVENER’S ‘THEOPHANY’ WAS PUBLISHED ON CD A FEW MONTHS AFTER THE FIRST DISINFORMATION TRACK [2]. CORNELIA PARKER’S ‘MASS’ IS A STUNNING SCULPTURE CONSTRUCTED FROM THE CHARRED REMAINS OF A TEXAN BAPTIST CHURCH WHICH BURNED DOWN AFTER BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING ~ FRAGMENTS OF CHARCOAL SUSPENDED ON THIN THREADS, ARRANGED WITH INTIMIDATING PRECISION IN FORENSIC RECONSTRUCTION, AS A GHOST-IMAGE OF A MONOLITHIC BLACK CUBE: SUSPENDED IN MID-AIR, BLACK AS DEATH, SHIMMERING LIKE JOHN DEE’S OBSIDIAN STARLIGHT MIRROR. CO-OPTING THE LANGUAGE INVENTED BY CORNELIA PARKER FOR HER ACOUSTIC ARTWORKS ~ THE ‘NEGATIVES OF SOUND’ ~ FULGURITES BECOME THE ‘NEGATIVES OF LIGHTNING’.”

EXTRACTS FROM A LECTURE WRITTEN FOR THE FINE ARTS SOCIETY OF LONDON GUILDHALL UNIVERSITY, DELIVERED ON 22ND OF OCTOBER 1998 {SPECIAL THANKS TO GIOVANNA CASSETTA AND CLAIRE FITZPATRICK}

[1] ALSO WALTER DE MARIA’S SUPERB “THE LIGHTNING FIELD”, 1977

[2] “THEOPHANY” BY DISINFORMATION ON “A FAULT IN THE NOTHING” ASH 2.6 2CD, 1996
AND “THEOPHANY” BY JOHN TAVENER ON “EIS THANATON”, CHANDOS DIGITAL CD, CHAN 9440, 1996

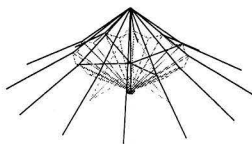


"IT CAN BE PRODUCTIVE TO LOOK BEYOND THE PEJORATIVE ASSOCIATIONS OF THE WORD 'NOISE', PARTICULARLY WHEN DEFINED AS COMMUNICATIONS INTERFERENCE, BECAUSE DOING SO EXPOSES LISTENERS TO PHENOMENA OF SURPRISING COMPLEXITY AND IMPORTANCE. BENOIT MANDELBROT'S OBSERVATION OF ESCHER-LIKE SELF-SIMILARITY IN THE NOISE PEAKS OF FAX INTERFERENCE WAS AN IMPORTANT PRECURSOR TO HIS DISCOVERY OF THE MOST COMPLEX OBJECT IN MATHEMATICAL HISTORY. LIKEWISE RADIO REALISES UNPRECEDENTED SYNÆSTHETIC OPPORTUNITIES, EXPANDING PERCEPTUAL BANDWIDTH, AND OPENING AFFERENT PATHWAYS TO FLOODS OF UNFAMILIAR IMPULSES... THE WHISTLERS, TEARING, DRONES, HISS AND CRACKLES RADIATED BY LIGHTNING ARE IDENTICAL TO NOISES BROADCAST DURING THE GENESIS OF LIFE ON EARTH ~ AT THE ELECTRICAL IGNITION OF THE PRIMORDIAL SOUP. A STRONG GEOGRAPHICAL CORRELATION EXISTS BETWEEN THE INTENSITY OF ATMOSPHERIC INTERFERENCE, AS ILLUSTRATED IN RADIO SCIENTISTS' TOPOGRAPHICAL NOISE CHARTS, AND DIVERSITY OF SPECIES ~ IN THE TROPICS. THE ROLE OF LIGHTNING IN THE FIXATION OF ATMOSPHERIC NITROGEN MEANS THAT THE PROVERBIAL HAND OF GOD CAN, EVEN TODAY, STILL BE DETECTED AT THE BASE OF ALL LIVING ECOSYSTEMS.

IN WESTERN CULTURE A NOISE ~ THE 'BIG BANG' ~ IS THE ARCHETYPE OF CREATION ITSELF, WHILE EXTENSIVE LITERATURE RESEARCH HAS REVEALED THAT IN ARABIC CULTURE EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE. JUST AS IN VISUAL LANGUAGE THE SPARK (WHICH IS THE SIMPLEST FORM OF RADIO TRANSMITTER) IS THE PRIMARY SYMBOL OF ELECTRICAL ENERGY, IN VERBAL LANGUAGE IT IS THE PRIMORDIAL SYMBOL OF CREATIVITY."

EXTRACTS FROM THE SUMMARY OF DISINFORMATION CONCEPTS WRITTEN FOR HULL TIME BASED ARTS'
"TOOT" FESTIVAL BROCHURE, PUBLISHED IN ISSUE 14 OF "MUTE" MAGAZINE
{SPECIAL THANKS TO GILLIAN DYSON AND MIKE STUBBS}

The Sound Projector SEVENTH issue 2000



"THE EFFECTS COULD WELL BE CALLED UNPRECEDENTED, MAGNIFICENT, BEAUTIFUL, STUPENDOUS AND TERRIFYING. NO MAN-MADE PHENOMENON OF SUCH TREMENDOUS POWER HAD EVER OCCURRED BEFORE. THE LIGHTING EFFECTS BEGGARED DESCRIPTION. THE WHOLE COUNTRY WAS LIGHTED BY A SEARING LIGHT WITH THE INTENSITY MANY TIMES THAT OF THE MIDDAY SUN. IT WAS GOLDEN, PURPLE, VIOLET, GRAY, AND BLUE. IT LIGHTED EVERY PEAK, CREVASSE AND RIDGE OF THE NEARBY MOUNTAIN RANGE WITH A CLARITY AND BEAUTY THAT CANNOT BE DESCRIBED BUT MUST BE SEEN TO BE IMAGINED. IT WAS THAT BEAUTY THE GREAT POETS DREAM ABOUT BUT DESCRIBE MOST POORLY AND INADEQUATELY. THIRTY SECONDS AFTER THE EXPLOSION CAME, FIRST THE AIR BLAST PRESSING HARD AGAINST THE PEOPLE AND THINGS, TO BE FOLLOWED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY BY THE STRONG, SUSTAINED, AWESOME ROAR WHICH WARNED OF DOOMSDAY AND MADE US FEEL THAT WE PUNY THINGS WERE BLASPHEMOUS TO DARE TAMPER WITH THE FORCES HERETOFORE RESERVED TO THE ALMIGHTY. WORDS ARE INADEQUATE TOOLS FOR THE JOB OF ACQUAINTING THOSE NOT PRESENT WITH THE PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS. IT HAD TO BE WITNESSED TO BE REALISED."

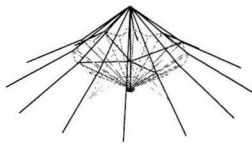
BRIGADIER~GENERAL THOMAS F. FARRELL, QUOTED IN A MEMO TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR,
WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, BY MAJOR GENERAL L.R. GROVES, 18TH OF JULY 1945

"SEEN FROM THE AIR, THE CRATER ITSELF SEEMS LIKE A LAKE OF GREEN JADE SHAPED LIKE A SPLASHY STAR AND SET IN A SERE DISC OF BURNT VEGETATION HALF A MILE WIDE. FROM CLOSE UP THE 'LAKE' IS A GLISTENING INCRUSTATION OF BLUE-GREEN GLASS 2,400 FEET IN DIAMETER, FORMED WHEN THE MOLTEN SOIL SOLIDIFIED IN THE AIR. THE GLASS TAKES STRANGE SHAPES ~ LOPSIDED MARBLES, KNOBBLY SHEETS A QUARTER-INCH THICK, BROKEN, THIN-WALLED BUBBLES, GREEN WORM-LIKE FORMS"

TIME MAGAZINE, 17TH OF SEPTEMBER 1945, P. 68

"AND I SAW AS IT WERE A SEA OF GLASS MINGLED WITH FIRE: AND THEM THAT HAD GOTTEN THE VICTORY OVER THE BEAST, AND OVER HIS IMAGE, AND OVER HIS MARK, AND OVER THE NUMBER OF HIS NAME, STAND ON THE SEA OF GLASS, HAVING THE HARPS OF GOD."

REVELATION 15:2



"THE INVENTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WAS THE ULTIMATE ARTISTIC PROJECT OF THE 20TH CENTURY. NUCLEAR WEAPONS SIMULTANEOUSLY REPRESENT THE ZENITH OF HUMAN INTELLECTUAL CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATIVE ABSTRACT THOUGHT, AND THE ULTIMATE HISTORICAL EXPRESSION OF THE GHOSTLY, MORBID, DESTRUCTIVE ASPECT OF THE SUPPRESSED UNCONSCIOUS MIND. THE UNIMAGINABLE BEAUTY AND AWESOME SONIC POWER OF ATMOSPHERIC NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS ARE MATCHED ONLY BY THE APPALLING TRAGEDY OF THEIR HUMAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND POLITICAL COSTS.

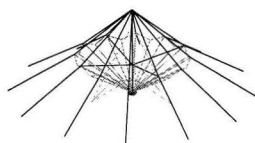
CONCEIVING THE ULTIMATE REALISATION OF THE MATHEMATICAL TECHNIQUE BEQUEATHED TO WESTERN SCIENCE BY THE ACCOUNTANT ABU JA'FAR MUHAMMAD IBN MUSA [AL-KHWARIZMI], WHOSE 'ILM AL-JABR WA'LMUKÁBALAH' CONTAINED WITHIN ITS INTRINSIC STRUCTURE THE MICROCOSM OF BOTH NEWTON'S 3RD PRINCIPLE AND, THEREAFTER, THE THEORY OF RELATIVITY, EINSTEIN OFFERED AN ALGEBRAIC BLUEPRINT ENABLING TRANSMUTATIONS BEYOND THE WILDEST FANTASIES OF EVEN THE MOST EXTREME MEDIEVAL ALCHEMISTS ~ BEYOND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ONE PERIODIC ELEMENT INTO ANOTHER, TO THE DIRECT TRANSMUTATION OF MATTER INTO ENERGY, THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF NUCLEAR WAR.

THE THEOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WERE QUITE OBVIOUS FROM THE OUTSET ~ NOBODY KNOWS WHO CHRISTENED THE TEST SITE AT ALAMOGORDO, WHITE SANDS, NEW MEXICO AS 'TRINITY', BUT IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE A MORE APPROPRIATE NAME. THE THERMONUCLEAR FLASH IS A SACRILEGIOUS PARODY OF THE ACT OF BIBLICAL CREATION. RATTLING THUNDER {KING OF THE GENIES} ROSE UP FROM THE DESERT SANDS, HIS POTENTIAL COMPRESSED BY CENTURIES OF IMPRISONMENT BETWEEN THE PAGES OF 'THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS', AND UNLEASHED AL-SAYHATAN WĀHIDATAN. HIS PENT-UP FURY INSCRIBED THE REWRITTEN LAWS OF NATURE ONTO A LAKE OF JADE-GREEN MOLTEN SAND ~ DECLARING WAR, IN THE LONG TERM, NOT SO MUCH ON SPECIFIC POLITICAL TARGETS, BUT INSTEAD UPON REALITY ITSELF."

TEXT WRITTEN TO ACCOMPANY DISINFORMATION'S "THEOPHANY" ~ A SOUND INSTALLATION EXHIBITED IN THE CHAPEL OF THE UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR WARFARE COMMAND CENTRE AT TROYWOOD, ANSTRUTHER, 19TH OF JUNE 1999. "THEOPHANY" IS A RECORDING OF THE ELECTROMAGNETIC NOISE IMPULSES WHICH CAN BE RADIATED BY ELECTRICAL STORMS AND ALSO BY NUCLEAR WAR [1] {SPECIAL THANKS TO LESLEY O'HARE, LESLEY WILKINSON AND DREW MULHOLLAND}

[1] SEE "ELECTROMAGNETIC EFFECTS" IN "NUCLEAR WEAPONS, PRINCIPLES, EFFECTS AND SURVIVABILITY" BY CHARLES S. GRACE, ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE OF SCIENCE, SHRIVENHAM, UK / BRASSEY'S, 1994, PP. 91-105

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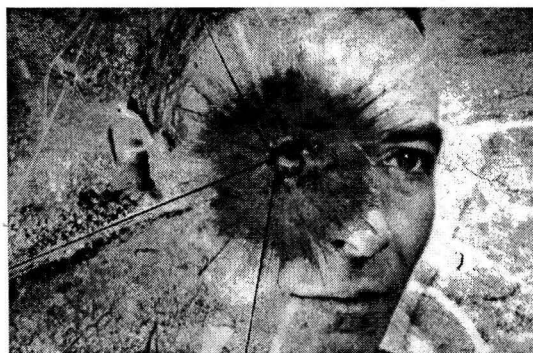


THE "NEGATIVES OF LIGHTNING" ARE NECKLACES, BROOCHES AND EAR-RINGS MADE FROM PARTICLES OF DESERT SAND FUSED BY LIGHTNING STRIKES TO THE GREAT SAND SEA, SOUTH WESTERN EGYPT (DATES UNKNOWN), AND BY THE FIRST EVER MAN-MADE NUCLEAR EXPLOSION, 'GROUND ZERO' AT 'TRINITY', ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO, ON THE 16TH OF JULY 1945.

IN 1981, 36 YEARS INTO THE PROCESS OF RADIOACTIVE DISSIPATION, THE CURATOR OF THE TULAROSA BASIN HISTORICAL MUSEUM WROTE [IN THE "LAPIDARY JOURNAL", JANUARY 1981, PP. 2276-2278] THAT THE RADIOACTIVITY OF 'TRINITITE' (OR 'ATOMSITE') FRAGMENTS HAS REDUCED FROM ITS INITIALLY HIGHLY DANGEROUS STATE TO A LEVEL "NOT MUCH MORE THAN AN ILLUMINATED WATCH DIAL" ~ AND A FURTHER 19 YEARS HAVE SINCE ELAPSED. HOWEVER, WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT MANY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ROUTINELY EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO KNOWN CARCINOGENIC RISKS, NONETHELESS READERS MUST CLEARLY UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS NO THRESHOLD BELOW WHICH ANY RADIOACTIVITY CAN BE EVER UNDERSTOOD AS BEING ENTIRELY SAFE, AND THEREFORE ALL INSPECTIONS OF THE TRINITITE "NEGATIVES" ARE MADE ENTIRELY AT THE INDIVIDUALS OWN RISK.

ENQUIRIES RELATING TO THE "NEGATIVES OF LIGHTNING" SHOULD BE SENT TO NEGATIVESOFLIGHTNING@YAHOO.COM, OR TO THE AUTHOR IN PERSON

{SPECIAL THANKS TO SUSANNA NIEDERMAYR}



Peter Hammill

The Fall of the House of Usher

FIE 9121 CD (1999)

Roger Eno and Peter Hammill

The Appointed Hour

FIE 9120 CD (1999)

The ever prolific Peter Hammill returns with two albums of quite staggering dissimilarity. It's galling how little attention he gets, this eccentric fifty year-old who has been responsible for over forty albums, every one of them a Gordian tangle of weighty propositions and speculations. That some of his projects are more successful than others is due less to inconsistency than to the exacting, far-reaching nature of his enquiry, as these two releases demonstrate. *The Fall of the House of Usher* is an opera (not a 'rock opera') based on Edgar Allan Poe's tale of the same name. When originally released by Some Bizarre in 1991, after some eighteen years' on-and-off work by Hammill and his librettist Chris Judge Smith (the co-founders of Van der Graaf Generator), it disappeared without trace. When the rights reverted to Hammill he began a process of revision, using advances in studio technology and rethinking certain key aspects of the piece. He re-recorded his own vocal parts, removed all drums and percussion and added lots of electric guitars.

The result is a revelation. The original version suffered from the limitations of the recording techniques available to Hammill at the time, and sounded dry and colourless. In contrast, the depth and clarity of the new version throw into sharp relief the awesome power and terror of this work. The unlikely cast of singers includes, besides Hammill, Andy Bell of Erasure, Lene Lovich and Sarah Jane Morris. Together they act out a morbidly fascinating tale of love, friendship, madness and betrayal. The vocal performances are uniformly excellent, particularly that of Hammill himself, who in the role of the increasingly demented Usher reaches jaw-dropping heights of declamatory fervour. When read on the printed page, Smith's libretto seems rambling and prolix; interpreted by these singers, it becomes lucid and elegant. The rhetorical richness of the words means that the music is inevitably low on melody.

Hammill has never been much of a tunesmith. Instead the guitars and keyboards surge and retreat, pulsing with grandeur and taking on a macabre chill as the drama unfolds. The collaboration with Roger Eno is an intriguing experiment in aleatory composition which doesn't really come off. Hammill and Eno improvised in their respective studios for exactly an hour at 1 pm on 1 April 1999. *The Appointed Hour* combines these recordings, with no overdubs. Conceptually, the idea is impeccable; listening to the outcome, however, is less than enthralling. The pair tinkle away pleasantly on guitar and keyboard, and the parallel strands occasionally coalesce to produce moments of stimulation. But for the most part this is inoffensive background music, devoid of the vitality which Hammill normally brings to his work.

RICHARD REES JONES



Moments Of Stimulation:

○○○○ TUNES & SONGS! ○○○○

Nocturnal Emissions

Electropunk Karaoke

EARTHLY DELIGHTS CD002 CD (2000)

The title comes from a description of an Emissions gig which appeared in this very magazine! Nocturnal Emissions' live performance at The Garage last year was a frustrating affair because despite its being far too quiet and over an insubstantial PA, the tape of the event sounded like I'd attended something worth getting very excited about, even if this was far from apparent on the night. This CD collects seven tracks from five different NE live sets performed in recent times. I don't know if these gigs were as problematic as the one I saw, but whatever the case, it's made for a fucking fantastic CD. As Nigel Ayers has stated elsewhere, his live material has of late been quite different to the studio produced albums. The live setting is after all a very different one to the privacy of your own noise cave, so he's chosen to present an updated and remodelled incarnation of the Nocturnal Emissions that produced *Songs Of Love And Revolution* and *Shake Those Chains, Rattle Those Cages*... and Lordy - I find it hard to contain my excitement! 'Bring Power To Its Knees' and 'No Sacrifice' are the oldest original numbers here. They're still immediately recognisable even though the original sounds of echo delayed beat boxes forcibly introduced to their own arses is replaced by smooth skittery sequences and frenetic sampling.

'No Sacrifice' is actually one of my desert island discs. Very few groups have managed to deliver direct and simple statements of anti-establishment leanings without sounding like worthy but dull bores (see four million drab anarcho-punk bands as of 1983) and NE not only managed to do it with conviction but came across as positively poetic in the process. 'No Sacrifice' is one of the most joyful celebrations of not getting a job at McDonalds (or whatever) that I've heard, put together with the irrepressible joy of a kid in a toy shop and delivered like Mark E. Smith without all those french fries on his shoulder. A hard act to follow, but he's succeeded by avoiding a simple reanimation of the vintage model and - Lumme! - it's as good as the original!

The other tracks are largely new to me, or at least were as of the performance at The Garage. Confusingly, there are covers of 'Venus In Furs' and The Pink Fairies' 'Do It', neither of which sound particularly out of place. There's also the Stephen Hawking sampling 'Imaginary Time' and 'Di For Me' which goes into pornographic detail with some er... eccentric observations about the death of Prince Chuck's late war-zone visiting main squeeze, Although the technology is all new, Nigel



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Ayers still seems to approach it with the same haphazard enthusiasm that informed his last beat music albums all dem years ago, and as a consequence still doesn't sound like any of those other drum machine and sequencer acts. Also, his singing has improved, in that you could call bits of it 'singing' which wasn't always the case. With the crooning and the odd chuckle prompted by something in the audience, this is almost Las Vegas without the cheese, the fruit machines, or the mob.

Electropunk Karaoke is punk rock spirit in the truest sense, rewritten for the 21st Century. It's packed with sly humour, warm electric beats and is entirely lacking in the clichés that might be wheeled out by less able dabblers in either the techno or ye olde punque roque of which this is a distant cousin. Play it loud and often, as the man says.

WAR ARROW

Earthly Delights, PO BOX 2, Lostwithiel, Cornwall, PL22 OYY, UK.

La! Neu?

Year of The Tiger

JAPAN, CAPTAIN TRIP CTCD-124 CD (1999)

It doesn't get off to a good start. Random drum pummelling, drunken wino shouting and a French housewife trying to sing. One big fucking discordant racket basically and it doesn't bode well when I realise the playing time is over an hour. Over an hour of this shit!!?

Thankfully it comes to a sudden stop as La!Neu? really get down to business. At first, a Michael Krassner-style minimal piano chord is repeated. Gentle swells build behind it, surging forwards, filling the void. The music stirs images - helicopters flying over a barren landscape, a jet black Plymouth Barracuda surging through Monument Valley under a sky loaded with storm clouds. A drumbeat is the rotors, the engine roar echoing against the rock walls, throbbed against the melody and establishing a perfect soundtrack for the next David Lynch film. It's an offbeat road movie and the chase is on. This is a long track and develops along vaguely 'symphonic' lines with recognisable movements and shifts of emphasis and mood. It never degenerates into the cacophony threatened with Track 1, finally gliding into shore at the 30 minute mark with the 'post rock' flag hoisted high.

The final track is Maori war drums and Viktoria Wehrmeister delivering bored intonations of 'Notre Dame' that suggest early Kraftwerk and Human League but to be honest, it's little more than Enya with art school knobs on. It's not unpleasant but hardly the successor to track 2 where La!Neu? clearly shot their wad, creatively speaking.

Having approached this record with no preconceptions or real idea about the band I'll admit to being pleasantly surprised by what they can achieve when they really pursue an idea to its bitter end. Emotions remain distinctly unstirred, which may be the intention, and what we're left with is restrained atmospherics that might make good background music for painting empty car parks but there's better examples already out there so this is just more product to fill the shelves. Only for the committed fan, I reckon.

RIK RAWLING 01/12/1999

Captain Trip Records, 3-17-14 Minami-Koiwa, Edogawa-Ku, Tokyo, Japan

Mount Florida

Stealth

MATADOR OLE399-2 CD SINGLE (1999)

Maybe it's just me? Maybe I'm just getting old, too old to get 'it' anyway - the 'it' being modern music as defined by the 'dance' or 'electronic' labels (and any of the ever-increasingly hilarious sub-labels. Jungle. House. Speed Garage etc etc. I recently heard of a new one - 'Disco Hop'. It's beyond parody, it really is). It seems there's so much of it and so many people doing it that the endless tide of vinyl and CDs amount to just so much bric-a-brac found on sale at your average Craft Fair. The creation of the work may have given those involved some pleasure but it's virtually indistinguishable from any other series of blips and bloops farted out in bedrooms and basements up and down the country (not to mention the amount of 'in-sampling' going on with thousands of grooves sharing the same hillbilly mutant sonic genes - Fatboy Slim being the Dr Mengele of this evil practice). Of course, the same arguments could be levelled at 60s 'garage punk' - a musical genre I happen to like - but the difference with that music is that it came born of the desperation and passion of

a new and, at that time, unquantified youth culture as opposed to the 'cool' stance taken in these oh-so-knowing times. This is not the place to get into the tired old 'authenticity' debate - let's just say it's easier for me to share in the experience of something that sounds fashioned by humans as opposed to robots throwing vacuum cleaners down staircases.

Not that such a simple dismissal could be levelled at Mount Florida. Oh no. MP Lancaster and 'Twitch' are the carbon-based bipeds behind this project, both DJs and dabblers in 'arts/installation' projects. Hmmmm. Putting my reservations aside I approached this EP with an open mind and I'm pleased to report that I wasn't completely appalled though it's got to be said that the press release's suggestion that 'the music they produced was neither dance-orientated or soundtrackish' is bollocks.

This is exactly what you can expect to hear when 'Yoof TV' blipverts rape your screen - all sounding not a lot unlike the tracks from David Holmes' 'Let's Get Killed' that the BBC have used for everything from *Match of the Day* to *Holiday*.

There are elements of everything from dub to 'ambient' here but all tastefully arranged so that nothing intrudes on the generally restrained mood. Picture the scene: the converted loft 'apartment', the cluster of cool specimens all wearing the latest tight and baggy things, all smelling the same, all thinking the same, all being the same.

As they drink over-priced piss (not because they like it but because it's 'cool' to be seen to drink it) they lend one ear to the soundtrack of their 'pre-club warmup' and give a considered nod to Mount Florida. Titles like 'Lost in Satie' and 'Roc the Vonnegut' (I'm not kidding) hint at a depth that simply isn't there. This is lazy, passionless, unassuming and about as offensive as a nun. It's the sound of this week's fashionable drink evaporating in a glass. It's that good.

RIK RAWLING 29/11/1999

*Matador Records Ltd, PO Box 20125, London W10 5WA
www.matadoreurope.com*

Breathless

Blue Moon

TENOR VOSSA BREATHCD16 CD (1999)

Breathless are surely one of the most cruelly ignored groups of the 80s and 90s. *Blue Moon* arrives a full eight years after their last album, *Between Happiness and Heartache*, and is likely to be greeted with the same indifferent response. That would be a monumental injustice, for the record is a masterpiece - its deeply passionate romanticism flows with immense power through every one of its sixty minutes. The group's singer and keyboardist, Dominic Appleton, achieved a measure of notice with his vocals for the 4AD studio-based project *This Mortal Coil*. His lisping, forlorn voice is a crucial component of the Breathless sound. On this album it's surrounded by an abundance of mesmeric instrumentation - strident guitars, eerie keyboards and harsh, clattering percussion. The opening 'Walk Down To The Water' is seven minutes of dramatic, windswept melancholy. In wistful, languorous cadences Appleton describes a condition of pure loss and regret, made tangible by restrained beats and gentle washes of sound. The song's overwhelming sense of desolation is communicated not by sullen posturing but through a perfect alignment of emotion and gesture.

From here on, Breathless never put a foot wrong. 'Magic Lamp' is a desperate invocation of sexual jealousy, its choppy rhythms erupting frantically into ecstatic currents of guitar. Moments such as this, and tracks like 'Come Reassure Me' and the thunderous 'No Answered Prayers', recall the tragic luminosity of Joy Division or My Bloody Valentine; but Breathless' epic vision is wholly their own, manifested in dense harmonic structures and Appleton's harrowing meditations on desire, pain and confusion. As if this weren't enough, a limited edition bonus CD extends the album even further into abstraction and dissonance. 'Moonstone' is fifty minutes of sinister rumbles and scrapings, with spare treated guitar and percussion underlining the sense of threat. Perfectly complementing the first CD's rapt engagement with songform, 'Moonstone' completes an emotionally devastating release.

RICHARD REES JONES

Tenor Vossa, 1 Colville Place, London W1P 1HN



Radical Mechanics

Reanimated Death Metal and
Skinning the Hide of the
mouldy old Rock Behemoth

Mogwai

Young Team

CHEMICAL UNDERGROUND
CHEM018CD CD (1997)

I offer what follows, dear reader, not so much as a review, but more as a cautionary tale. Some time ago I had the misfortune to collapse in the street, victim to some strange and momentary paralysis which deprived me of the muscle functions of my body. Whilst helpless and supine, a copy of the *New Musical Express*, which had been discarded in the road, was picked up by a gust of wind and blown into my face. Unable to animate my limbs or call for assistance I began to peruse said periodical, an action I would have avoided under normal circumstances. I was interested to read a special feature intriguingly called 'No Sell Out'. The premise of said item was an overview of bands renowned for their uncompromising refusal to kowtow to commercial concerns. Bands whose unique vision burned so bright that it sometimes made things difficult for them, in an industry where schmoozing and shifting units are deemed more important than staying true to one's convictions. Somehow, an article about The Clash had erroneously found itself printed in this section. I dismissed this as a silly mistake; besides, I was more interested to read of this group Mogwai. What praises were sung of them! A five piece who perform only instrumentals of soul-searing guitar noises, veritable symphonies of rhythm and feedback that drag the listener screaming from plateaux of nihilist terror to heavenly vistas of purest golden light, and back again. 'Fuck my old boots,' thought I, 'this lot sound like they'd eat Ramleh and Splintered for breakfast before making Merzbow clear away the table and do the washing up. Wearing a pinny!'

So, *Young Team* is in the CD player, I'm wearing a crash helmet and have a cricket bat

with nails in it at hand just in case. I press play and dive behind the sofa waiting for a sonic tsunami to blast the flesh from my bones. At first there is silence, then a sound a bit like The Smiths comes from the speakers. Jangly guitar rock. 'Jingle-jangle' it goes for a couple of minutes before turning into Big Country with a slightly beefier fuzzbox. Damn. I've been duped again!

Anyway it carries on in this manner for what seems longer than the actual duration of the CD. Loud. Quiet. Strum. Strum. Jingle. Jingle. Loud again. The only thing that seems to be missing is some goateed teenager with a conspicuously middle-class name like 'Parthenon' or 'Findus' mumbling self-conscious Americanisms about his girlfriend.

There is a lesson here for us all, and one which probably explains the popularity of others, like LaBradford, who prove equally disappointing when compared to the claims made by music papers on



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their behalf. Mogwai might've sounded better had my expectations been less, and I'm sure there are people who genuinely love this CD, but then it's not as if we're suffering from a shortage of bands at the moment who do the same thing about ten times better. I'm only glad I didn't actually buy it. I wonder if the local library might refund the 30 pence I frittered away in borrowing this slab of unredeemable shite?

WAR ARROW

Fu Manchu King Of The Road

MAMMOTH RECORDS 0103352MAM CD (1999)

Often dismissed as a laughably 'retro' homage to the populist impression of 70s culture, Fu Manchu are very much a 90s band. Music like this wasn't made in the 70s. For all the Black Sabbath and Blue Cheer similarities suggested by critics this is very much rock of the now. Modern production values bolster the riffs, load the bass with Semtex and render the drums something out of Norse legend. In comparison, something like 'Paranoid' sounds hopelessly clubfooted and tinny. But, more than that, it's the Fu's complexity of structure, tight 'musicianship' (dig it, *Mojo* readers!) and striking ability to fashion something fresh from the hide of the mouldy old rock behemoth that stands confidently on its hind legs and pisses all over the doubters. As they whinge about comparisons with Kyuss and Monster Magnet they are showered with the stark truth - are you going to rock or are you going to fuck off? The dinosaur stampede riffs and killer bee swarm fuzz pummel their way to the cerebral cortex and demand a Cro-Magnon response from those willing to give themselves totally and utterly to it.

Lyrical concerns are for dragsters, Camaros, hitchhiking chicks in cut-off jeans, *Silent Running*, skateboards, Bigfoot and airbrushed vans. It's nostalgia for a time and place that never really happened - not to the extent that 'retro' revivalist media twats would hope for. In truth, it never got past the adverts in Marvel Comics but its existence in the virtual reality of millions of teenagers imaginations make it no less valid. Lead singer Scott Hills was a teen in the 70s and has clearly decided that 'growing up' and abandoning his fantasies for leaden dull adult concerns is not for him. Backed up by his dudes - all dressed the part in Vans trainers, faded denim and t-shirts - surrounded by walls of amps, what we the audience get is an insistently realised nowhere for us all to indulge in. After all the tiresome irony and fakery of the 90s it's great to see someone with the courage to stand for what they believe in. Fu Manchu are not kidding. All the packaging (skateboarders stoked, Sammy Hagar poodle wigs, beach buggies, bordered logos) is perfect down to the last detail. But it's nowhere near lazy club flier 'appropriation', these are totems for the True Believers, signifiers of intent and purpose - which is, quite simply, to Rock Like Bastards.

When 'reality' is minimum wage slavery, pension plans and reward points all we've got to fall back on are our fantasies. So let's make sure they're good ones! Make mine Fu Manchu. 'Nuff said.

RIK RAWLING 01/12/1999

info@mammoth.com
www.mammoth.com
www.fu-manchu.com

Nine Inch Nails The Fragile

NOTHING CIDD 8091/490 473-2 2 X CD (1999)

As everyone already seems to have a fixed opinion regarding Nine Inch Nails, a review such as this is probably unlikely to make a difference one way or the other, particularly as the reasons why many find them almost unlistenable are the exact same reasons that I just can't get enough. At worst they're characterised as one big long Yankee teen-goth temper tantrum, which really is doing a disservice to the evidently great amount of care and attention that Trent Reznor puts into his records. Sure, he whines and wails like Harry Enfield's Kevin the teenager; this music is as terminally introspective and stuffed with pimply self hatred as it gets, and without the smarmy irony of slightly hipper acts like Ministry or those other turgid industrial guitar clones.

As it happens, the lack of irony is refreshing, and it isn't as if there's a shortage of it elsewhere in rock. I suspect what puts many off NIN is actually their success in getting bums on seats. They were for a while the perfect MTV group. Whether by accident or design, the fusion of the grunge aesthetic with nasty electronics and the nihilism turned up to 10 just seemed to strike a lot of chords within the mallrat nation, leading to the assumption 'it can't be cool, my kid sister likes it.' I saw the most extreme example of this in an advert on Mexican TV, selling something that the language barrier prevented me from quite getting, aided by loads of cute little Mexican kids bouncing around in a park to tinny pop. My eyes popped out of my head at one little shortie wearing a NIN T-shirt, and I hope to God that her parents don't let her go to school, swinging a satchel full of Barbies, singing 'I want to fuck you like an animal. I want to feel you from the inside.' Anyway, enough of this. I realise that this may be a rather radical concept, but just because something is popular with garage mechanics, little kids, or (shudder) people who never went to university, it doesn't by definition have to be bad.

It's been a while since the last proper album, and perhaps with the realisation that *The Downward Spiral* should've been an impossible act to follow, Mr Reznor's taken his time and by the sound of it, literally sweated blood in order to do just that. Not only has he succeeded in going one further, but he's actually made it a lengthy double CD that doesn't let up for a minute. The usual bits and pieces are here, the grinding synths, the distressed noises cruelly sampled into strict tempo, the Black Sabbath riff-fest (© Tommy Vance 1982), the screwy time signatures, the juxtaposition of hard noise with softly recorded acoustic instruments, and the teenage poetry. This isn't to say it's more of the same exactly. Somehow this is a more panoramic effort than its predecessor, without really being anything that could resemble stadium rock. Sniffy remarks aside, somehow the fact that *The Downward Spiral* was recorded at a location notorious as the scene of the Manson killings infused that record with a certain atmosphere. Shit and death and tragic lunacy seemed to emanate from the grooves; it has a certain Nevada desert ambience. This was recorded in New Orleans and you get a similar effect with the stranger-lynching bayou landscape of Southern Comfort insinuating itself into the background. All this death and horror isn't even used as the predictable Ministry-style stick with which to beat listeners over the head. It's exactly what it says on the tin, death and horror and self-loathing in all its awful spectacle, just as it feels in real life before some smug wanker turns it into 'confrontational art'. NIN's music has nothing to do with black clothes, murderers, piercing yer todger or any of the usual rock window-dressing. It is the most painfully internalised music I've heard. Much of this album feels like it's completely unaware of anyone out there who might be listening, imposing upon the listener the status of an uneasy voyeur to the unravelling emotional implosion. The lyrics aren't the greatest ever written, but it almost doesn't matter. I doubt that many people become Tennyson on the occasion of penning a suicide note. It is the simplicity of the words, and the agonising conviction with which they are sung that imbues them with a power beyond the contents of the syntax. There is to my knowledge no NIN track called 'Why Am I So Much More Sensitive Than Everyone Else?' (although some come close) but I have no doubt that he could turn even that line into something that would take the skin off your custard.

There's no point in picking out the finer songs. I might as well just print a full track list. Despite all the twists and turns, from the reanimated death metal to the more restrained but still noisy pieces to the valium glow piano codas with unorthodox rhythms, it never drops into cruise mode for even a second. There's quite a few different musicians but *The Fragile* still sounds like it's all going on inside the head of one extremely tortured soul, Adrian Belew is here, and rather tantalisingly, Dr Dre turns up to mix one track. I'd heard that Dre was working with NIN and it strikes one as a pairing so bizarre that it sort of makes sense, so hopefully this isn't the end of that particular story.

Nine Inch Nails should be treasured. Trent Reznor's music takes introspection to such an unbearable extreme that it ceases to be an aesthetic, ceases to be a part of showbiz. Think of the most intensely oppressive piece of music you've heard and then imagine that it rocks like a motherfucker. *The Fragile*. Joy Division are Chas and Dave, and AC/DC were the authors of minimalist tone poetry.

WAR ARROW



Skipload of T-a-p-e-s

overdue returns from the Ferric Library

Iain Paxton Landscape Problems

CASSETTE C60 (?1995)

This wasn't actually sent for review. In fact I can't recall quite when it turned up in a jiffy bag, and I never properly determined why it was sent to me, this being in pre-Skipload Of Tapes days. Presumably I have accrued such a volume of obscure and occasionally unlistenable cassettes that my collection has achieved critical mass and is now expanding exponentially, drawing other works into itself from across the world by somehow exerting an influence on the collective unconscious. This leads me to the unpleasant conclusion that my ferric library will soon collapse under the mass of its own gravity, becoming a single superdense singularity-oxide cassette which weighs more than the sun, and sounds a bit like Nurse With Wound.

Landscape Problems doesn't sound like Nurse With Wound, although it's in the same ballpark. Perhaps not that close to where Steve Stapleton, dressed as an elephant, is urging his team on with a string of incoherent onomatopoeias, but fairly near the factor X hot dog stand with its 15 different flavours of ketchup. Most of this is recorded by basic means, but not so basic as to detract in any way from the contents. The instrumentation comes largely from a randomly-played acoustic guitar, accompanied by sound loops of itself, speeded up, slowed down, and running normally. I'd guess a sampler is involved as a means of looping certain noises, and there's some lovely knackered old tape loops as well, none of which are used as rhythm substitutes. Other sounds derive from an old music box, environmental recordings, and the like. Even with the tape trickery and the odd electronic noise it all seems richly acoustic. If this sounds a little confusing,

titles like 'Jackpot In A Dog Shop' and 'Gaz Disaster' appear reluctant to give up any further clues. Technically speaking I would probably say *Landscape Problems* is unlistenable, but it's so nicely done and unpredictable that the oddness just keeps you going, wondering what's coming next, which is no mean feat considering there's only a fairly limited range of sounds being used.

This may not even be available any more, but if curious try:

Iain Paxton, 148 Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, UK

Konstruktivists Kracked At The Konservatory

EE TAPES ET34 CASSETTE C88 (1995)

Nearly an hour and a half of music improvised live in the studio by the 1995 line-up of Konstruktivists, a group whose personnel seems to change almost as often as does the spelling of their name. The cover informs us that this should be 'klassed as Eurock', which seems as good a description as any. To be specific I think this means that band see it in terms of following a strain which leads back to Can, La Düsseldorf, Kraftwerk and the like. Do not purchase expecting to hear one of those hairy-chested Eurovision rejects that had a big hit in 1985 and is now reduced to appearances on *Eurotrash* or in front of a dwindling fan club of lunatics. The ten tracks are divided up neatly, so although improvised it seems fair to assume that it was done around a basic framework of programming, breaks for tea and use of toilet facilities. The dominant sounds are synth and keyboard derived, carried along by programmed and live electronic drums, and far from simply aping Krautrock forefathers it reminds me a bit of Chris and Cosey, or at least what

that pair would sound like if they still had some creative spark informing their well-meant but sterile music. The tracks sort of start and amble along for a while without going anywhere specific, but there's enough going on in there - percussive flurries and hidden patterns emerging from the undergrowth - to hold the attention.

After eight solid albums, probably hundreds of tapes, and a brace of bizarre singles spread over twenty years in this crazy world of showbiz, it should be fairly obvious that Konstruktivists are serious about their music, and frankly it's astonishing that a few more of you lot haven't taken notice by now. It just goes to show the power of marketing, or failing that putting a picture of a sodding gas chamber on the cover. With CD rereleases it's not even as if you have to pay £50 for early monsterpieces like *A Dissembly* or *Psycho Genetika*. Come on, let's see some bums on seats out there. Buy the goddamn tape, already.

EE Tapes, Duivenhoeksestraat 14, 4569 TJ Graauw (Paal), Holland

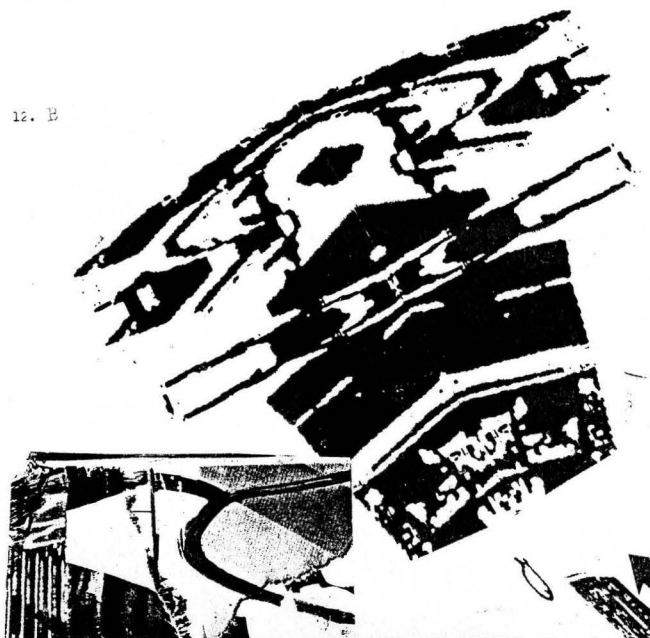
Regular Untitled

N/A, CASSETTE C90 (1998)

The Ceramic Hobs CD reviewed in ATOMS OF PURE NOISE was sent with a letter of thirty but valid remarks, one of which was that the medium through which music is promoted is no indication of quality. There's some blinding stuff on cassette, and there's some deeply useless rubbish available on CD. Okay, so it's an obvious point, or at

least should be, but it worth restating every so often. Regular is a vivid illustration of this. He's been doing music for years in the privacy of a flat above a pie and mash shop, leaking the odd tape to the outside world on all too infrequent occasions. He should've been massive, but the closest he ever got was almost becoming a member of Wolfgang Press, which didn't happen. So he stuck to his own thing, just for pleasure, and due to a lack of enthusiasm for all that self-promotion stuff, never really bothered with hawking tapes around. Which is a shame, because this is real groundbreaking stuff.

The influences are mainly of the (pre-1990) Adrian Sherwood, Scientist, Lee Perry and Jah Wobble school, with dollops of Tommy Trinder and similar chirpy Cockney entertainers of yesteryear, who are alluded to in titles such as 'Reg Varney's Mobile Coconut Shy'. That said, this music doesn't sound overwhelmingly influenced by any one source, although there are groups making tracks which now sound like Regular tracks from over a decade ago. He was doing Massive Attack years before that hyped-up trip hop thing took off, at a time when Bristol's finest were Vice Squad for gawd's sake. Most of the tracks are driven by deep bass and deftly programmed drum patterns, which seem too organic to have originated from a little box with buttons on, sounding more like one of those late 70s dub plate rhythm giants who, although having smoked such an unfeasible volume of space fags that he's lost the ability to speak, stand, or remember his own name, seems to have



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ascended to a higher plane of mesmeric percussion. Vocals are rare, but heavily treated tapes are used sparingly for atmosphere. I'm told there's a lot of sampled material, but each track is so heavily worked over and remixed and reworked and rewired that much of it is undetectable or irrelevant. There's some Portishead apparently, which seems to me akin to David Bowie ripping off Gary Numan, but little else I can easily identify. Regular music is lavish and spacious, pregnant with unspecified potential, brilliantly produced, and above all deeply evocative without being all new-age and soppy. If Mad Frankie Fraser had grown up listening to Regular he'd have been Reasonable Frankie Fraser. Similarly Brian Blessed would be renowned for an inscrutable and soft spoken approach to his trade. This stuff really is superb.

If you run a record label, I don't care who you are, I'll bet this tape is superior to 99% of your output. Being a reclusive individual, who isn't really too fussed about whether anyone else hears this, Regular supplies no contact address, but - if anyone is interested, I'll forward any mail sent care of this magazine.

Lode Runner Locked

RACING ROOM / XERXES
CASSETTE C46 (1999)

I found the last Lode Runner offering disorientating but promising in that it suggested there were better things to come. If anything *Locked* is probably even more confusing than *The Bubble Sort*, but somehow manages to convince with a greater conviction. It's packed to the brim with unpredictable fart noises resulting from what sounds like one of those garden shed-sized computers of days gone by that's suffering from the after effects of a bad pint. You know the sort of thing - 'I feel like death warmed up this morning but I can't have had more than 15 last night. One of them must've been a bad pint!' Either that or the author has used the playing surface of his *Derek Bailey In A Moulinex* CD as a temporary jam storage area and damn - why won't this thing play right? My stereo must be fucked!

No insomniacs are going to be reaching for *Locked* as a relaxing prelude to visiting the land of nod, and the most musical (or at least rhythmical) stuff sounds like something The Daleks might

unwind to after Doctor Who kicked their arses on Orestes, the Ogron planet seen in the final episodes of Malcolm Hulke's classic 1973 tale *Frontier In Space*. My track notes made for the purposes of this review range from 'short wave radio falling down a fire escape' to 'William Bennett shifts himself in a wind tunnel', and as descriptions go, seem accurate enough to reproduce here. It isn't entirely my bag, but of its kind I've heard a lot worse. The sound quality is good so you get full benefit of the cheesegrater textures, and it does appear to know what it's doing. This may seem vague, but a lot of noise music sounds to me like it hasn't got a clue and is just busily making a racket because Darren's mam says he's having his tea, it's too cold to doss about down the precinct, and there's nothing on telly.

If, after reading this, you're on your way into town to pick up the latest Dissecting Table hot biscuit, or some other distorted recording of overtime at the canning factory, think again. Save yourself a pointless journey and twenty quid. Send for this instead. Just because it isn't famous, and doesn't have some worrying porno on the cover, doesn't necessarily mean it isn't equally, or even more, deserving of your attention.

Racing Room, 37 Egmont
Road, New Malden, Surrey
KT3 4AT, UK
Xerxes, c/o Yasutoshi Yoshida.
203 Fujimori-Kata, 1-4-5
Wakabayashi, Satagay-Ku,
Tokyo 154-0023, Japan

Unit

The Solo Sessions 1989-1999

VING CHUN PRODUCTIONS,
CASSETTE C60 (2000)

I've often found amusement in the paradox presented by some current exponents of the blues, screaming out old standards from the comfort of a yuppie cafe bar and a high powered day job at the advertising agency; virtuoso reproductions of songs originally written by folk in desperate circumstances, the poetic expression of needing to keep body and soul together reduced to meaningless signifiers of vitality with as little, or less, weight as anything you'd find in Spanish techno; 'Woke up this morning and found myself dead' as an archaic way of saying 'boom boom boom the Vengabus is back in town'. Andy Martin of Unit has addressed this contradiction with 'Perrier Road', like the poor sap who was beaten

to that meeting at the crossroads by Robert Johnson, he vocalises with believable intensity 'you know I had it hard, yeah, I had it so bad; one lousy business and shares in IBM was all I inherited from my Dad.' I don't think I've ever heard deadpan sarcasm used with such devastating intensity.

For those who don't know, Andy has been making music for quite a while. In punkier days he was partially responsible for The Apostles, who produced a lengthy string of albums, EPs and cassettes. They were starkly differentiated from their noisier brethren by intelligent lyrics and some beautifully melodic guitar work falling somewhere between a brainier Alternative TV and Joy Division without the aspirin. As someone for whom ground zero was as a homeless and uneducated ex-inmate of Springfield mental hospital, without parents or shares in ICI to fall back on, he probably has more license to sing the blues than most of us - and does so at great length on this cassette.

There are covers and appropriations of old masters ranging from John Mayall and Manfred Mann to Willie Dixon and John Lee Hooker. The playing is a little loose and raw in places but this lends the tape an explosive vitality entirely lacking in that freeze-dried note perfect version of the blues you get on yer Jools Holland show. The production is a little odd in places, emphasising the guitar and vocals more than is usual, but then this is consistent with earlier releases by Unit which tend to downplay the rhythm section in order to give greater focus to the melody. If it means anything, I'd generally cross the road, the channel, and half of Europe to avoid the Visa card version of 20th century UK blues, but I can't get enough of this cassette.

Neither is it all 12-bar tales of woe and revenge. There are a few songs of distinctly Asiatic inclination: 'Giai Phong' based upon a traditional Vietnamese folk tune is an uplifting acoustic number showcasing Andy's sublime vocal harmonies which will have you wondering how he's managed to remain obscure for so long. The instrumental 'Muon Chet Khong?' is pure punk rock of the kind that fans of The Clash will never be able to understand. It leaves me incapable of offering any description more succinct than a slightly shellshocked 'fuckin' brilliant!' There's even a sort of rumbling industrial piece, and a solo vocal rendition, of 'Willie MacKintosh'. Come on now - when was the last time you heard

a cassette that combined the blues with hard rock, free noise and folk music from China, Vietnam and Scotland? Not content with the simple act of creating such a bizarre cocktail, Mr. Martin actually pulls it off without so much as a visible seam, and a passion and humour sadly lacking in so many of his contemporaries. Far from falling flat on its arse like it should, this peculiar hybrid takes off with such conviction that you'll wonder why nobody's done it before. Why is this man producing cassettes when his name should be up there with the greats? You don't have to buy this tape, but it's your loss if you don't. I'm told it retails for the fine punky DIY ethic price of £1.50, which if correct, surely leaves you with little choice. Hmmm?

BBP Tapes, Box 81, 82 Colston
Street, Bristol, Avon, BS1 5BE,
UK

The Skip reviewed by WAR ARROW

SKIPLOAD OF TAPES COMPETITION!

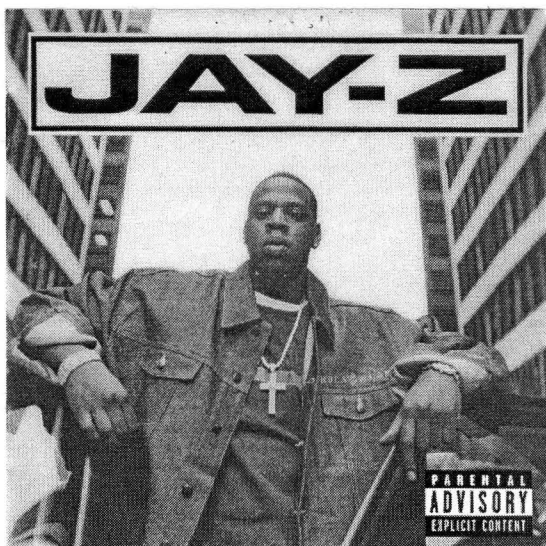
Due to quantum fluctuations of chronoton particles a wormhole has opened up in granular spacetime linking the Skipload mailbox to the five dimensional co-ordinates of an instant slightly prior to the publication of the last issue of *The Sound Projector*. The result is that the thousands of entries sent to last issue's competition have somehow remained in a state of temporal flux, thus giving the entirely erroneous impression that no fucker's been bothered to enter. Therefore until this anomaly within the spacetime continuum can be resolved without the creation of any paradox through the Blinovitch limitation effect (my inadvertently becoming my own father; a reader becoming the author of a tape he or she has just sent for etc.) last issue's questions still stand. They were:

1. Big Bloke. He was in The Cravats. Anagram of ehdSn.
2. Canine mammal. Four legs. Begins with D. Barks.
3. When is it generally thought that the curtains came down on the Anasazi culture of the South Western United States?

Answers on a postcard, with your address, to this magazine and marked Skipload Of Tapes Competition. In the unlikely event of a tie, the winner will be the one who got the answers right, and will thus become the lucky recipient of items reviewed in this column, most of which are probably superior to whatever rubbish you're listening to as you sit there reading this. Go on, be a devil. I'll throw in some CDs if you ask nicely.

SOUNDBOMBING

A Bonanza of Hip-Hop and Rap CDs reviewed by WAR ARROW



Jay-Z Volume 3...Life And Times of S. Carter USA, ROC-A-FELLA / DEF JAM 314 546 822-2 CD (1999)

I've avoided Jay-Z for as long as possible. At one point he was on the cover of every magazine, including *TV Quick*, *Older But Bolder* and *Bunty*, and I'm generally suspicious of anyone who suddenly achieves such ubiquity. He follows me to work in the form of Melvin, his spitting image. Interestingly enough, I've never seen Jay-Z and Melvin in the same room at the same time. One evening I heard the Tim Westwood show, quite by accident. I usually avoid his broadcasts because, despite some good tunes, his silly unconvincing accent causes me intense pain. What held my attention in this instance were a couple of truly ginormous tracks. I missed the announcement but it sounded like Jay-Z. He appeared to be rapping over a fucked CD. There were drum sounds aplenty, but any resemblance to a beat was entirely lost. Few could attempt such a thing without embarrassing themselves, let alone make it sound good. Sheer genius. With this being a few days before the release of Jay-Z's third I drew the same conclusions that anyone would, and rushed out to bag one of the bounders.

Well, none of the tracks I'd been impressed by are here, but I'm glad to have joined the ranks of all those accountants who go to work with a Jay-Z album stowed away in the briefcase. He's from New York, and despite a certain nasal whine factor, distinguishes himself from the homogenous multitudes with ease. He doesn't sound like he's either half-cut, or only just woken up, as do many of the New York set. The main difference is that lyrically he's way ahead of the pack. As well as possessing a degree of wit, he avoids those same lines that most of his immediate neighbours churn out. He tells stories, rather than just going on and on and on about his knob / criminal record / bitches / train set. Of course, these subjects crop up - well, except for the bit about the train set - but never just as a load of words for the sake of having something to rhyme about. Musically, it's pretty much razor sharp all the way, reminding me of the hard clean electronica of the last Foxy Brown album, on a grander scale. I'm pleased to note the sampling of King Ghidra's electronic roar on 'So Ghetto'. Anyone who's down with Godzilla films is okay in my book. Swizz Beats produces a few tracks, which are saved by the fact that Jay-Z is in the starring role. Timbaland also provides a couple of numbers, which aren't all up to his usual standard

(perhaps he's been listening to Swizz Beats) but again can't really fail with Mr Carter on deck. This said, Timbaland's 'Snoopy Track', in which embarrassed robots attempt to conceal sneaked-out farts at the cybervicar's tea party, are perfectly matched by Juvenile's drawled guest vocal, providing one of the album's finest. How the hell did I ever get the wrong impression about this guy?

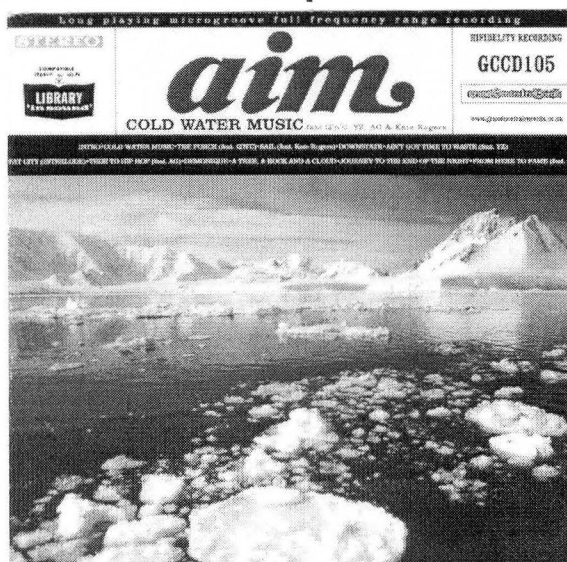
There's something a bit epic going on here. 'Hova Song' should be announced from the steps of the Acropolis with a toga-clad Jay-Z handing the stone tablets down to Charlton Heston. Split into two brief parts it serves as both intro and outro, which is mighty frustrating as it sounds like it should go on for about twelve minutes with ever-greater choirs of angels joining in at the end of each bar. As the first part fades to make way for what follows, a quiet reflective voice warns 'five-ten years from now you're gonna wish there was American commission...five-ten years from now...they're gonna miss Jay-Z.' Nope. I don't know what it's all about either, but as spoken rather than written words, it dishes out the cold shivers in spades. This doesn't feel like just another rap disc, it feels like a big album that's going to be making it into lists of such things for years to come. If for some reason this

turns out to be his swan song, five-ten years from now...they really are going to miss Jay-Z.

Aim Cold Water Music GRAND CENTRAL RECORDS GCCD 105 CD (1999)

Homegrown UK hip-hop is overlooked all too often, not least by myself I'm ashamed to admit. The reason isn't one of quality, but more because there's a lot more of it coming from America, and with a bigger advertising budget. Even our own (recommended) *Hip Hop Connection* magazine has confessed it doesn't put UK talent on the cover because unfortunately this would mean the difference between people buying the mag or not.

One reviewer wrote that Aim sound a bit like Fat Boy Slim, which is a terrible thing to say about anyone. Slightly deterred by such a report, I bought the CD anyway. It's more like what Fat Boy Slim THINKS he might sound like. *Cold Water Music* oozes the jazzy cool that Cookie would give his left one to achieve. It's largely a sombre and reflective album, almost bluesy but with different notes. The upbeat numbers get there without losing any grace or



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dignity, avoiding the obvious route where good cheer sounds like a happy wet dog wearing a clown's hat, as favoured by that certain ex-member of a turdy indie band. Four of the tracks feature rappers, all of whom confirm that we have no trouble holding our own against the Americans in this field. Every number is a widescreen classic of John Barry proportions, without suggesting scale by mere pomp or self importance. If John Barry was raised in Moss Side on a diet of Public Enemy, well...actually I don't even know if he would sound like this. *Cold Water Music* is quite different to anything I've heard in a long while.

The cover has the thoroughbred styling of one of those old bachelor's lounge records, with *National Geographic* quality cover photo, loads of little logos and proclamations of 'long playing microgroove full frequency range recording.' There's even a 'happy listening music lover' blurb on the back. Traditionally such things usually promise that group sex with nymphomaniacs will be the lot of he who listens to the album. Sadly, I've never found this to be the case, so it's nice to read a cover blurb that isn't just word-salad. The author writes 'when I drive with Aim in the tape deck the view seems somehow deeper and richer', and I couldn't hope to put it better myself. His aim is true. Right on target, etc etc (insert your own pun here).

20 Oldham Street, Manchester
M1 1JN, UK

www.grandcentralrecords.co.uk



Master P Only God Can Judge Me

USA, NO LIMIT RECORDS
P2 50092 CD (1999)

What's he playing at? First (he says) *Da Last Don* was his final solo album. Then we were to be treated to a Greatest Hits collection. Then the collection had the title named above. I rushed out and bought this expecting to find 'Ghetto D', 'Anything Goes' and 'Bourbons and Lacs' amongst P's finest moments. It was puzzling that not only were the aforementioned trunk bangers absent, but none of the titles seemed familiar. It turns out that this is his comeback set. Bloody hell! His retirement album only came out last year! He must live with an accelerated perception of time. Which is

probably the case, given that (solo or not) he crams five year's work into six months. Welcome back P, even though you didn't go away.

No Limit is falling off, they say. P's doing too much, spreading himself too thin, they've written in reviews of this album. The claim in the advert that P's comeback is the rap event of the decade is probably overdoing it, and this took about three plays to sink in. But I don't see the neon sign that proclaims 'PAST IT' lighting up. There's a couple of tracks that have yet to prove themselves to these ears. 'Boonapalish' (P talk for girlfriend, main squeeze, bird, boo, totty, etcetera - these linguistic affectations just get weirder and weirder) doesn't quite set my ears on fire, but then I could say the same about the odd number even on stone cold classics like *Ghetto D* and *Ice Cream Man*. What counts is the good stuff, which dominates the CD.

Master P, now that the initial excitement about the rise of No Limit has subsided, is taking a lot of flack. Lyrically, he isn't groundbreaking, and he does repeat himself somewhat, but - as has been the case since day one - he compensates for any shortcomings. Simplistic and repetitive or not, P comes through by sheer force of personality. There's rappers who should be in the Guinness Book Of Records for the most syllables crammed into one line, or the widest vocabulary, or whatever. Word-count though is only half of the story, and some of these gifted folks might raise an eyebrow without inspiring me to dig out the CD twice a year. Master P may not be painting with an enormously varied palette. On the other hand, after playing a Master P album you half expect to find him materialised in your kitchen, making himself a sandwich and offering a trademarked 'Uuuuuugh - ya heard me?' by way of explanation.

Maybe the title, and back cover, where P carries what could either be a couple of gravestones, or tablets bestowed upon him in a repeat of the whole Moses incident, hint at a certain degree of immodesty. But what the fuck - there really IS some fine stuff here. 'Ghetto In The Sky' is as compellingly soulful as anything Marvin Gaye ever did. 'Stop Playing Wit Me' is another of those stuttery shiver-down-the-spine tracks that nobody seems to do quite like No Limit. 'Y'All Don't Want None' does the being-run-over-by-a-tank thing,

not least due to the appearance of Mystikal, who STILL sounds like a bomb going off in a rap factory. 'Da Ballers', featuring P's fellow Southern multimillionaire Jermaine Dupri of So So Def, bumps and grinds just like you'd hope a track from such a combination would. Even 'Crazy Bout Ya', where P is joined by Mercedes and Peaches for one of those last song at the village disco slowies, carves sweet soul from a genre I'd more commonly associate with unlistenable saccharine mush.

The gold medal goes without a doubt to 'Get Yo Mind Right' where P and C-Murder do their stuff over music provided by New Birth. New Birth I know nothing about, except that they seem to be a full-sized live band, you know, with real instruments and that. They do a sort of Gypsy-Cajun violin powered 'it's a funeral but let's have a knees-up anyway' thing. It's quite amazing. Unless I'm showing my ignorance, it sounds like that darn fool kid's just invented a whole new branch of hip hop.

Master P is back, and this isn't his greatest hits, but a whole new album. Do you really need to ask if it's any good?



Various Artists Violator - The Album USA, VIOLATOR / DEF JAM 314 558 941-2 CD (1999)

This compilation has now sold so many copies and is so famous that I've seen whitebread computer programmers wearing the T-shirt...in Dulwich! Everybody is on it. You name them, they're here. I expect even you, dear reader, are on this compilation somewhere. Yes, YOU. Mrs C Morgan of Ruislip, sitting there reading this magazine, even YOU are present, teamed up with Busta Rhymes and Noreaga. We're one step closer to that holy grail of hip hop collections where even the special guests have special guests.

Violator is a sort of label cum management thing, based in New York, whence many of these folks hail. There's some good stuff by Fat Joe, Big Pun, Triple Seis, The Beatnuts, Cru, Q-Tip, and Mysonne. LL Cool J goes with a catchy Spanish guitar number which keeps threatening to turn into the Pearl & Dean music. The dirty South is represented by Eightball and Hot Boy\$. Busta Rhymes turns up on four of the tracks - even though it seems like more - with his crazy

whooping-noises-over-a-beat antics. Busta. We love your records, really we do. That Janet Jackson one was great. So was the 'put your hands where my eyes can see' song, but please, for fuck's sake, take a holiday.

Still, at least you could never confuse Busta with anyone else, which, this being a New York set, is the main problem with the rest of it. Every day some new East Coast rapper seems to turn up and go platinum with the same old lines about the same old thing with the same old anonymous nasal whine. Haven't you people heard of Vick's Sinex? Since when did hip hop cred become proportionally represented by the tonnage of snot you can keep up your hooter at any given time? Of the human bogle storage units in question, the most mystifying must surely be Noreaga. How come he's so big? You can always tell it's Noreaga because he says 'what'. Many rappers have a special noise because, well, they just do. Master P has 'uuugh', MC Eiht has 'geauh'. Noreaga says 'what' usually about 27 times in a row, because if he didn't, nobody would have a fucking clue who was on the mic. It could be any of about 5,000 others. Okay Nore, you can start now. After five solid minutes of 'what' we've realised it's you. One day Noreaga will do a track where he just says 'what' 700 times, over a beat. Where's Malcolm's Mum when we need her?

None of these people are bad or without talent, it's just that you can't tell one from the other without referring to the track list. At the moment the simple fact of coming from New York seems to imply there's some kind of genius at work, when, a lot of these folks are kind of average. The kindest I can say about some of them is that they succeed in filling up three minutes of a CD. The same goes for the music. Some of it's great, but most of it just happens and then goes away in time for the next number. Swizz Beats supplies the final track and he seems to be symptomatic of this bizarre NYcentric attitude that prevails. I haven't heard everything he's done, but what I have heard fails dismally to live up to its publicity. His plinky-plonky hip hop interpretations of traditional oriental music are alright, but folks pay him \$5,000 a track. Lord have mercy! Treat ME to a pint and some crisps and I'll do something ten times as good. He's no Timbaland. He's not even Puff Daddy.

If you go ape for the homogenised Big Apple whine,

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you'll be like a dog with two tails listening to this. There's enough here for an above average EP, but with regards to the disparity between what *Violator* promises and what it does, I'm reminded of the man from Long Island who famously said *don't believe the hype*.



Full Blooded Memorial Day

USA, NO LIMIT P2 50027 CD (1998)

Why did I shell out a massive import price for this? Firstly as an attempt to discover evidence that No Limit are, as some claim, past it. This wasn't one of their best sellers by a long shot. It wasn't advertised so well. Full Blooded is perhaps a bit of an unknown quantity, so, I reasoned, if Beats By The Pound really are stretching themselves to breaking point in providing the music for at least 50 No Limit albums per day, then chances are that the stuff they knocked out with paper, comb and a pair of spoons will have ended up on an album such as this. The second reason is that Full Blooded himself makes brief but highly memorable appearances on *Da Crime Family*, and the *I Got The Hook-Up* soundtrack album. Thirdly, *Memorial Day* has a fucking great cover.

Eighteen squid for 16 tracks is a lot, but it's well spent. Full Blooded is, unless I'm getting my wires crossed, a member of Hounds Of Gert Town, who themselves have made an album. Señor Blooded's fellow hounds, Nite Time and Camouflage, appear extensively on this album, and it's easy to see why he's been granted the starring role in this instance. The imagery, both visually and vocally, is heavy with the war veteran aesthetic much favoured by No Limit. Full Blooded not only looks like he's spent six months in a tiger cage in Phnom Penh, but raps like he's on his last legs, screaming out for the troop carrier to wait one more minute. It's as if he's rapping against a cacophony of helicopters, landmines and AK47 fire, scrambling to get out before they drop the Agent Orange. He seems to approach each track like it might be his last. All of which contrasts dramatically with the music which is amongst the most languid and soulful I've heard from No Limit. There's an expertly balanced tension at work, particularly during the slow bass horrorcore of 'Red Rum' and 'Countdown', which sounds like they've run out of

bullets and have started firing orchestras at each other.

At worst I expected that if *Memorial Day* did turn out to be crap, appearances by C-Murder and Snoop Dogg might make up for the rest, but Private Blooded manages to hold centre-stage even during walk-on parts by such big cheeses as these. As Gangsta (or 'reality rap' as some folks are now calling it) goes, this is about as grizzled and dirty and just plain old ugly as it gets, so I don't think Full Blooded is likely to be guesting on any Mariah Carey releases in the foreseeable future. When even the relatively obscure albums are of this quality there's little to suggest that No Limit have finished the live ammo. Full Blooded might not be a huge seller, so far as I can tell from this side of the Atlantic, but then sales aren't everything and you've got to be impressed by a man who could make a bus timetable sound like a battle cry.

May contain sexual swearwords.

through this CD, you get a whose passel of consecutive 'geaups'. Which is cool with me.

MC Eiht (pronounced 'eight') was in Compton's Most Wanted and has done shitloads of albums. This is the latest. The last two weren't up to much as he's admitted himself. He was trying to get out of a shitty contract, and was getting some shitty treatment from the record company, so decided a couple of shitty albums were all they deserved. Before this he'd made a name acting in the film *Menace II Society*, and by having an album stay at number one for five weeks, which at the time was unusual for a hip hop artist. So even though he hasn't been away, *Section 8* could almost be called a comeback.

He's now signed with Mack 10's Hoo Bangin' label, thus keeping it West Coast, and produced a set which is as solid as I'd hoped it would be. He's been giving it the old verbals since at least 1987, and you don't last that long

Twistas, but you could never mistake one for the other.

Eiht's tales, told with skill and humour, are still very much of the kind you'd expect. It's street level stuff, which may sound a cliché, but it's not just the story, it's the way it's told, and Eiht is a master of his art. If you were expecting tales not of the hood, but of topographic oceans or whatever, then you'd have to be a bit bonkers to expect them from wor kidda here. The slow funky music has got 'West Coast' written Blackpool rock style through the centre of every single note. It's lush without going over the top, and even the nervier numbers like 'Ill Tha Hood Way' have an easy-going undercurrent, albeit of the 'I'm not feeling stressed about the bank robbery' kind. Section 8 may not score points for holding any dramatic surprises like a Timbaland or Mystikal album. But then some rare and exotic foods are easily ruined, and pie and mash can be fit for a king if prepared with the same care and attention that MC Eiht has supplied here.

There's an increased tendency to fill hip hop albums with little between-track skits and unfunny gags. The majority of these 'funnies' are there just to fill space and get the label's money's worth out of the CD pressing plant. Here we get 'Tha Nail Shop (Luther's Outro)' courtesy of er...the MC Eiht Dickswingers, if you please. It still makes me laugh after repeated plays. When even the bits that you usually leave on the side of the plate are good, it's an indication that MC Eiht isn't making albums just because he can. Geauh.

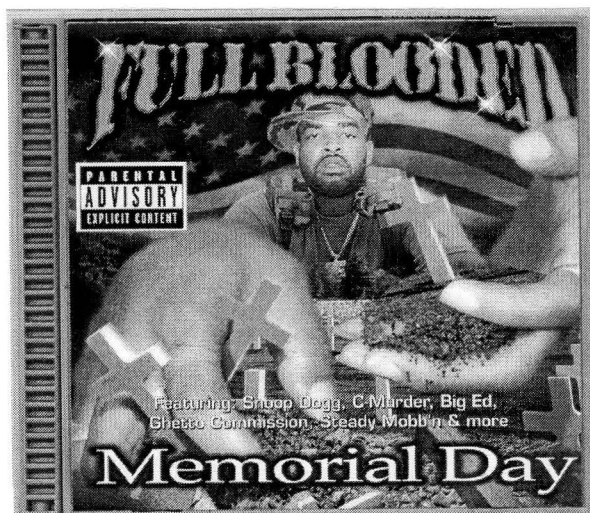


Dr Dre The Chronic 2001

USA, AFTERMATH ENTERTAINMENT / INTERSCOPE RECORDS 490 486-2 CD (1999)

I can see this is going to be another incarnation of that same review I keep writing which goes 'everybody thinks this is bad and (insert name) is a spent force...but I think (insert name) is good and this is a tour de force!' Oh well. Let's go...

A friend, whom I shall call Paul, who is an enthusiastic fan of techno and dance music, recently turned up on my doorstep. 'I am busting for a shit,' he explained, 'so I will need to avail myself of your lavatory or else I fear I shall soil my trousers presently.' I of course invited Paul in and warned



MC Eiht Section 8

USA, HOO BANGIN' RECORDS P2 50021 CD (1999)

There's nothing I appreciate more than a rapper with a distinctive noise. There's Master P saying 'uuuuuugh' whenever occasion demands. Fiend has his 'wooooo!' Mystikal has 'aaaaagh!' Mack 10 finds 'west-siii-eeed' suits his purposes best. Missy Elliot makes high-pitched teleprinted sounds. Perhaps the king of these noises is MC Eiht's 'geauh', pronounced 'jee-uh'. But what does it mean? 'Hello boys and girls, I'm MC Eiht and I'm pleased to make your acquaintance' perhaps? Anyway, he sure says it a lot. If you skip

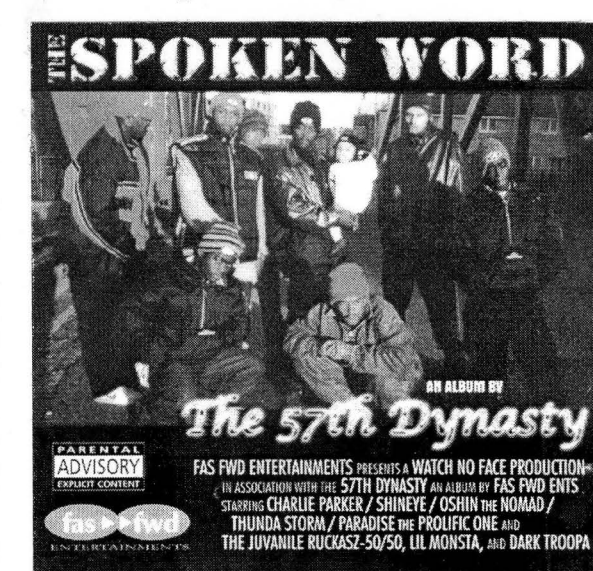
without having something going for you. Geauh.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that New York is where hip hop lives. Los Angeles has definitely lost out in recent times, which seems a bit mad as the quality and quantity of West Coast rap is as strong as ever. What is more, none of the LA chaps have made it big by sounding like someone else. New York seems to have produced a whole legion of Nas soundalikes lately, and the presence of a few genuinely original talents like Terror Squad and Jay-Z only serves to emphasise how generic the rest of them are. Back on the best coast, as they say, Mack 10, Ras Kass, Xzibit, Techniec, and MC Eiht may not have the sonic gymnastics of yer Bustas and yer

him that I was entirely bereft of any bottom-wiping material but for a copy of dance-zombie organ *Mixmag*. Paul sniffily informed me that he'd rather take his chances than insult his bum with such material, and so, accordingly turned and retraced his footsteps down my garden path, filling his trousers to capacity just as he reached the gate. Wondering at such a decision, I took my first glance at the *Mixmag* which had somehow come into my possession. Paul was right. It was utter toss. There's a review of *The Chronic 2001*. They thought it was rubbish. Where the hell did these pencil-neck Alice DeeJay-listening know-nothing assholes get enough heart to criticise Dr Dre? This is the man who's probably had a bigger influence on the last ten years of hip hop than anyone. Even if his latest IS wack, you don't just conveniently forget what this man's done. Even *Malady Maker* managed to get it right, despite their embarrassing revelation that Dre's suddenly invented a brand of hip hop that he's been perfecting for at least the last five years.

Hip hop, more than any other genre, seems especially unforgiving of the odd lapse. Build 'em up and knock 'em down seems to apply with capital letters in rap circles. Indie types will overlook the odd disappointing glitch in the career of Oasis - like the fact that everything they've ever done is utter toss. But Master P (for example) loses 25 cents in a faulty donut vending machine and the knives are out. Snoop's second album got the treatment for the terrible crime of being a different record to *Doggystyle*. It's been the same with Dr Dre, forever having to live up to the expectation that one day he's going to remake the album that put him up there in the first place.

Anyway, despite the weight carried by unfavourable reviews in *Mixmag* and *The Wire*, there's no problem. He's done it again, AND without simply restating past glories. *The Chronic 2001*, so named because of Death Row's insulting un-Dre related compilation *The Chronic 2000*, is a perfection of the hip hop *Addams Family* theme music the good doctor's been messing around with for some time. It's a distinctive sound - spaghetti western hip hop perhaps - which might be hard to place if you took away the vocals. Obviously there'd be no point in wheeling out the g-funk once again. Just about everyone else is doing a variation on that anyway. The current Dre sound hasn't always



worked this well. His contributions to The Firm album somehow never quite gelled as they should, leaving Foxy Brown and Canibus carrying the mantle. He's thickened out the sound, filed off a few of the harsher edges, and got rid of the clunkiness. The new model is not only roadworthy but if this album was a car, which was a woman, it would etcetera etcetera. The cast of thousands invited to drop some verbals looked a bit scary on the sleeve, but the disc just glides effortlessly through the 22 tracks in a time that has you wishing he'd pulled out the stops and made it a double. Eminem (surprise!), Kurupt, Xzibit, King T and other notables are here. For sheer vicarious thrills, it really is great to hear Snoop Dogg and MC Ren - despite the modesty of his contribution - back with the doc once again. There's a potent chemistry going on, and everyone seems to be bringing the best out of each other, not least the man himself whose raps from the perspective of someone who's older, wiser, and a family man, represent a voice that's heard all too rarely in hip hop. Of course there's still a certain degree of criminal or otherwise fruity activity being described, but with the same originality, humour and eloquence you should expect from Dre.

The term rap veteran, thanks to dodgy record contracts and the tooth-and-claw politics that always seem to apply when anyone dares to follow up a killer debut, is almost as strong an oxymoron as 'military intelligence' and 'Channel 5 News'. Nevertheless, Dr Dre is rapidly becoming a pillar of this tiny elite, who have achieved longevity by virtue of persistence and refusal to keep making the same album over and over. One day, he'll be as highly regarded as

Muddy Waters or BB King, and expect he'll still be dropping fine albums right up until the end.

The man is an originator, and it doesn't sound like he's going to be running out of gas anytime soon.



The 57th Dynasty Spoken Word

FAS FWD ENTERTAINMENTS FF06 CD (1999)

More UK hip hop, which I'm just waiting for some tosspot to label 'Brit Hop'. I'd have to be doubly ashamed if I missed out on this lot, seeing as they live just down the road. They're part of a collective thing which incorporates DJs, MCs, producers and at least a few groups who split off into solo acts when the need arises. There's a wide range of talents involved - Spoken Word is largely hip hop, but there's a strong ragga element.

Musically there's a lot that fills the gap between Terror Squad and Wu-Tang. Which can't be bad, particularly as it doesn't borrow at the expense of having its own strong identity - even if one of the main men is rapping with a Stateside twang. Before anyone's nose starts moving in an upwards direction, the laddie in question - Paradise - lived in the Bronx for 18 years, so is entitled to sound American. Would you expect him to do a Dick Van Dyke? 'I say thee nay', as The Mighty Thor would put it. Talking of the blokes with the vocals, of which this lot have no shortage, it's all good, well-told, powerful stuff. It's a great improvement on the majority of half-arsed stuff coming from New York at present. The excellently named

Lil Monsta gets a special mention for finer wordplay than a 14 year-old surely has the right to be capable of. With such a formidable cakehole, I doubt that a job in MacDonalds is something he'll need to worry about.

Charlie Parker's production is flawless throughout. Lyrically, nobody is coming out with a load of words just for want of something better to do, and as a result there's a good few hot potatoes on offer. 'Pattern 57' is the Elgar symphony that's just spilt your pint but you still know not to fuck with. 'Words, Power and Sound' keeps yer arse moving and yer head ringing. It's about the first ragga-dancehall thing that I've truly connected with. Soppo although it may sound, I've found the weird steamhammer offbeats a bit inscrutable up until now, but suddenly it all makes sense. Maybe these boys just do it better than anyone else.

Darkus Howe presented a TV series recently asking where English culture is to be found. He had to dig up some seriously twisted and ugly specimens in the course of this investigation. Contrary to what inbred Oldham mutants and the Outrageds of Dover might like to believe, English culture as a flag-waving pie-scoffing arsehole is on its last legs. Real English culture (if there is such a thing) is more likely to be found amongst the people who are bothering to make it, instead of just recycling the past, Oasis-style. The 57th Dynasty are the real thing, and will probably have to wait a long time before Tony Blair invites them round for tea and buns. Come on kids, show your support for Fas Fwd and treat your CD player.

www.fasfwd.com



The Notorious B.I.G.

Born Again

USA, BAD BOY 78612-73023-2 CD (1999)

Unlike Tupac, who shuffled off this mortal coil leaving Muslingauze quantities of unreleased material behind, Biggie departed for the celestial donut stand with pretty much everything he'd done readily available. Before his tragic demise, just as *Life After Death* was finished, there were rumblings about his next album, which never existed in any form more substantial than an idea for the title - *Born Again*. Puffy has

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scraped together just enough miscellaneous outtakes, demos and suchlike to frankenstein Biggie's last album into existence. Is this a good thing? Hmm...tricky.

Although it's been said that the new tracks aren't the sort of thing Mr Wallace would've rapped over, musically it's okay. None of it stinks...too much. With Biggie's distinctive voice flowing like dark asthmatic chocolate, and his lyrical inventiveness, you know it's got to have something going for it. Leaving aside the dubious morality of posthumous albums, as opposed to those which simply didn't get released in the artist's lifetime, what's the problem?

For a start the amount of actual Biggie material is dwarfed by that of the numerous guest stars, presumably recruited to pay tribute to the late genius, but also to pad *Born Again* out

to album length. Everybody is on here. Stick a pin into a page of the phone book and it'll pick out the name of someone on this CD. Some I'm always glad to come across - Eminem, Snoop, Missy, Hot Boy\$ - but onions do not a hot dog make. At worst Biggie himself is a posthumous guest star on some numbers, and while they're always of some interest, few of his raps are as distinctive as those which came out in his lifetime.

There's something I find a bit uncomfortable about the whole thing. The only track I'd praise without reservation is 'If I Should Die Before I Wake', which has a truly chilling slice of industrial printing machine hip hop as backing, and a tension-filled rap from Ice Cube. The six-sided frozen one stands out by virtue of sheer dramatic impact, and he's one of the few whose

contribution acknowledges the passing of the main act. Many of these helping throats are pretending they've turned up on something B.I.G. would've done if he were still here. The most poignant piece is the spoken outro by Biggie's mum, which vividly brings home the full tragedy of her son's passing, but after a few minutes she's faded out - like her appearance is an afterthought. She paints a picture of Biggie as a sweet likeable kid who loved rap, not least because the success it brought him meant he could afford to be generous towards his loved ones, friends and family. Voletta Wallace's spoken piece is the most important track on the album and she deserves better than the status of an usherette who shows you to the exit once the film's over. Particularly when the main feature showcases such utter crap as Junior M.A.F.I.A.'s 'Biggie'.

This isn't a completely terrible album, although it does have big problems. It has its moments, but the bottom line is that it claims to be a Biggie album, and it doesn't have a hope of comparing well with *Ready To Die* - one of THE rap albums. In comparison this can't help but fall flat, and perversely it just gets worse with each repeated listen.



Public Enemy There's a Poison Goin' On...

USA, PLAY IT AGAIN SAM
PIASXCD004 CD (1999)

Excepting moments of superbly co-ordinated chaos such as 'Bring The Noise', I have generally felt PE, despite lyrical superiority, were always a bit too much for my taste. I can handle free-form

noise and feedback happily, but with PE the sheer relentlessness of their wall of sound, and that bloody saxophone squeal looped again and again, got a bit monotonous. Even Whitehouse offset and accentuate their sonic assault with quieter passages which emphasise the severity of the noisy bits.

Happily, Chuck D has realised that you can knock a wall down by means other than screaming at the top of your voice. This is his most listenable record I've heard, thanks to the jiggery-pokery of new accomplice Tom E Hawk. There's still the jarring loops, merciless beats, incongruous noises riveted onto a funky backbone, all square pegged into yer proverbial round hole, but with a great deal more artifice. There's a good sense of space and timing, allowing your ears breathing room, even on the more claustrophobic tracks.

Blummin' heck - there's even tunes you can whistle. Spaghetti Western ('Last Mass of the Caballeros'), guitar grunge ('Do you wanna go our way???') and even jazzy film noir ('I') are in the melting pot, making for a truly eclectic album, something which from Public Enemy would once have seemed as probable as a Leonard Cohen laff fest. I'll go further and say this disc makes the skip button on your CD player redundant. It isn't exactly PE's attempt to lure the kids away from The Backdoor Boys (or whatever they're called) - it jangles the nerves like their best stuff always did, only by different and less obvious means. Notably on 'Kevorkian' where the rhythm loop is just a fraction of a second too short for comfort, creating the aural equivalent of a heart murmur.

Flavor Flav normally succeeds only in screwing up Chuck's albums with his token solo tracks. 'Gett Off My Back' from 1992's *Greatest Misses* for example couldn't have been less welcome had it been a straight cover of a Russ Abbot song. Flavor Flav and his unfeasibly large timepiece get two solo spots here. 'What What' is pretty good, but much to my astonishment '41:19' is as fine as anything else on the record.

My only real misgivings were to do with the lyrical content. Chuck devotes more of his superbly crafted lines to sideswipes at other rappers than is necessary. None of it's overtly said but Foxy Brown, Snoop Dogg, Wu-Tang Clan and Master P are all alluded to. I guess Chuck's a bit fed up of the guns, drugs and money thing. Fair enough, but even so a bit trivial

for one with such an evidently astute view of the bigger picture. One line likens the way hip hop is sold by big white-owned corporations to a slave plantation, with rappers 'picking electronic cotton' for the boss man. Okay, no doubt a shitty record deal is a bad thing, but this analogy is a bit extreme, and surely insulting to the memory of the millions who lived and died in slavery. This point made, I recently read Chuck's excellent and even essential autobiography *Fight The Power*, which makes it clear that he only comes out with such melodramatic statements because he cares so much.

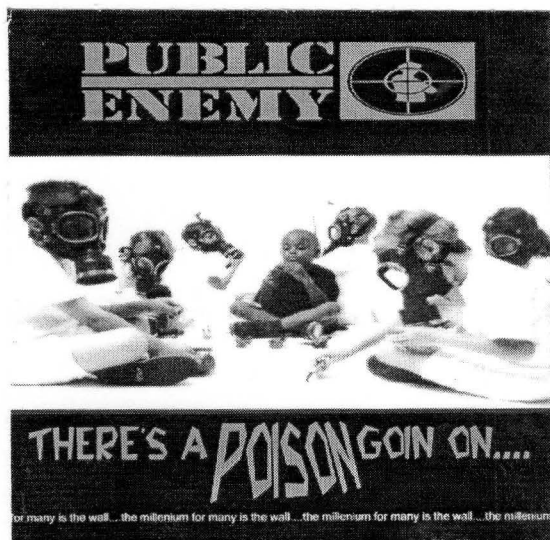
I once considered PE to be worthy, but overrated. On the strength of this CD, not to mention Chuck's illuminating autobio, I admit I've been an uninformed prannet. Boy, is my face red! The world needs more folks who care as much as Chuck, and anyone who ever doubted PE need to hear this record.

Also released on the web:
www.atomicpop.com or
www.publicenemy.com



Hoy Boy\$ Guerrilla Warfare USA, CASH MONEY RECORDS UD 53264 CD (1999)

The hip hop diss track has a long and confusing history. Sometimes things can get out of hand and it all ends in tears or death, but you've got to be aware that there's probably more going on than just a few rappers slagging each other off on wax. There are no clear cut laws of cause and effect. One of my favourite diss numbers is Westside Connection's 'King Of The Hill', on which Ice Cube, Mack 10 and WC express their reservations about Cypress Hill in terms that leave little room for ambiguity. It leaves your stereo begging for mercy, smoke pouring from the speakers. What did Cypress do to deserve such unrelenting fury? Whatever the case, it's a fucking amazing track despite the dubious morality. And in spite of his assertion that 'niggas down with Cypress can wipe the shit off my dick', Ice Cube named their debut album as an all-time favourite, and is currently starring in *Thicker Than Water*, a film produced by Mack 10 of Westside Connection and featuring a cameo by B-Real from The Hill. Talking of Ice Cube, he





A TRIBUTE BY WAR ARROW © 16 APRIL 00

SATURDAY 12TH FEBRUARY AND HAVING BLOWN MY PROVERBIAL WAD ON THREE 6 MAFIA CDS I'M WAITING IN LINE AT THE WALL OF PLENTY TRYING HARD TO ENJOY SOME FUCKING AWFUL NOREAGA TRACK ON THE RADIO.

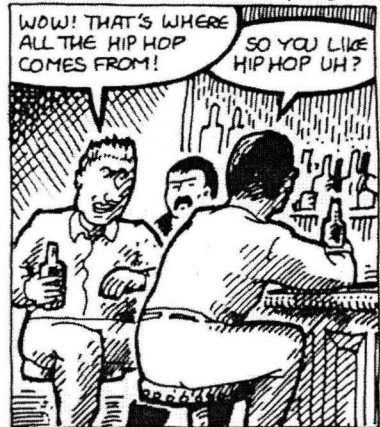


SUDDENLY AN ANNOUNCEMENT COMES OVER THE AIRWAVES...

BLAH BLAH BLAH BIG PUN WHO DIED OF A HEART ATTACK ON THE 7TH...



WHEN I WAS IN MEXICO THE FIRST ENGLISH SPEAKER I MET WAS THIS FRIENDLY LATINO GEEZER WHO IT TURNED OUT WAS FROM THE BRONX.



MAN, I WAS BORN AND RAISED BY HIP HOP. ME AND MY BROTHER Y'KNOW - WE WAS DOWN FROM DAY ONE, WAY BACK INNA DAYS OF FLUSH AND BAM AND THEM GUYS.



SERIOUS?!



FAT JOE AND BIG PUN! SHIT! LET ME GET YOU ANOTHER BEER!



THAT IMPRESSED THE HELL OUT OF ME. MEETING A GUY WHO KNOWS JOE AND PUN MADE MY HEAD SPIN EVEN MORE THAN THE BEER, THE JETLAG AND THE HIGH ALTITUDE OF MEXICO CITY.



BIG PUN WAS ALWAYS STREETS AHEAD OF MOST EAST COAST RAPPERS. HIS DEBUT ALBUM, 'CAPITAL PUNISHMENT' IS A STONE COLD CLASSIC. THE GUY HAD A LOT OF PERSONALITY.



SOME OF THE FLOWS THAT CAME FROM THAT 'SEVEN FOOT TALL WHITE TERMINATOR NIGGA' WERE FUCKING AMAZING. YOU'D THINK HE'D SOMEHOW LEARNT THE ART OF BREATHING THROUGH HIS ARSE.



I SUPPOSE IT SHOULDN'T COME AS A BIG SURPRISE. APPARENTLY PUN HAD TAKEN TO WORKING OUT SOMETIME LAST YEAR. I GUESS HIS DOCTOR MUST'VE TOLD HIM TO LOSE A FEW OF THOSE SPARE TYRES.



IT STILL SEEMS HARD TO BELIEVE HE'S GONE. SOMEWHERE IN HEAVEN, ON A REINFORCED CLOUD PUN'S THERE, HANGING OUT WITH BIGGIE AND 2PAC AND GAZY, PROBABLY HAVING A GREAT TIME PULLING TRAINS ON LADY ANGELS.



CHRISTOPHER RIOS AKA BIG PUNISHER, YOU WERE ALWAYS ONE OF THE GIANTS. WE'RE GOING TO MISS YOU.



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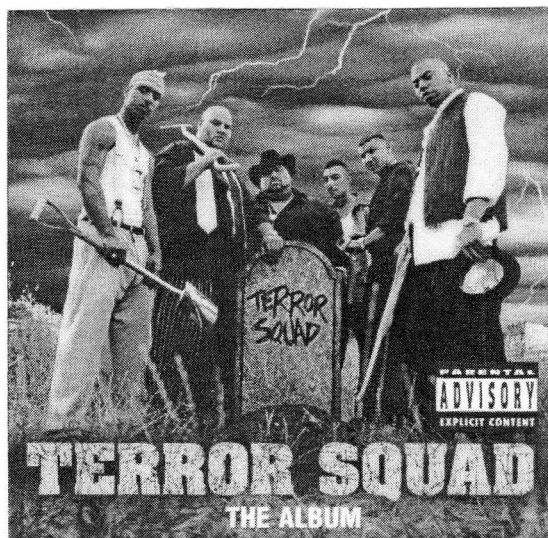
seems to be pals again with other ex-NWA members, despite their threat to cut off his head and fuck him with a broom on *Niggaz 4 Life*.

Dissing is hard to approve of, but it is sometimes entertaining. On the other hand, there's a record out by some bunch of nonentities, advertised purely on the strength that it takes a pop at Three 6 Mafia. Master P has never held his tongue in pointing out that slagging off other groups just to sell records is a bit sad. Although he's done a few diss records himself, they've never been specific. Names are withheld, and he makes sure it could be anyone's guess who's pissed him off this time. If he's party to any fires at least he's not fanning the flames, and sometimes he's there with the hose of reason - if you'll pardon such a weird metaphor.

Cash Money were around before No Limit, and were overtaken when that label blew up big time. There's probably a bit of resentment with some thinking No Limit is the *only* New Orleans hip hop label. Furthermore, a forthcoming No Limit film was to be called *Hot Boys*, which (P testily explains) is just New Orleans slang and he isn't trying to step on anyone's toes. Cash Money's prime movers aren't quite doing a Westside Connection, but they still can't help explaining that 'everyone knows who the real Hot Boy\$ are and it ain't these fake wannabe soldiers'. Fair play I suppose, but they sound strong enough as it is. They don't need the frequent references to that OTHER New Orleans label.

Guerrilla Warfare is produced by Mannie Fresh, another talented exponent of the New Orleans sound - skittery beats, squelching bass and frenetic electronic hiccups. It's a harder, more upfront and digital sound than that of Beats By The Pound. For my taste it lacks No Limit's deeper subtleties, but compensates with its razor-edge immediacy. The lads themselves, B.G., Young Turk, Juvenile and Lil Wayne do a stirring job, intoning their lyrically tight raps into the listener's earholes. Although quite similar, their voices are clearly differentiated by pitch, with Juvenile holding down the Daddy Bear end and Lil Wayne buzzing about overhead like some pissed-off, gang-banging mosquito. If a cat could purr angrily, four of them would sound like this. Imagine Top Cat minus Officer Dibble, with guns.

This album's had a lot of praise, most of it justified. While there's nothing that lets the side down,



there are fewer highs than on er...sorry...certain releases by that OTHER New Orleans bunch. This could be down to my own personal taste. 'Get Out Of Tha Way' and 'Clear Tha Set' stand out as works far greater than the sum of their relentlessly programmed parts, the former rolling along like some unstoppable butcher robot from an early Judge Dredd strip, knives whirring and slicing up everything in its path. 'You Dig' is the finest number here by a long shot, and could be called Stadium hop hop. You can almost see the lighters waved aloft. Ten years ago, Laibach would've done an ironic cover of this track.

Hot Boy\$ definitely deserve the attention they've been getting. They're pretty young so they're probably going to get better and better. Hopefully the beef will be resolved. New Orleans has two excellent labels and more than its fair share of microphone talent, so it's be nice if they could show a bit of solidarity.

Terror Squad The Album

USA, ATLANTIC 83232-2 CD (1999)

Any students of human biology requiring something truly esoteric to justify a research grant might do worse than look into correlations between the generously-proportioned and above-average rapping skill. Despite a few exceptions, a definite pattern is emerging. Notorious B.I.G. was no stranger to second helpings, and his legacy speaks for itself. Mia X, now involved in some legal dispute involving an ex-associate demanding recompense for all that fried chicken, is no verbal slouch either. Ice Cube, while not enormous, still retains a certain amount of puppy fat, and who can doubt that he has rhymed like a demon when occasion demanded. Terror Squad contains not one, but two large and phenomenally talented lyricists: Fat Joe - who makes Cyril Smith look like Nick Cave,

and Big Pun - who makes Fat Joe look like Nick Cave. Cuban Link is no tiddler, either. If my theory holds true, then Terror Squad should be unstoppable by virtue of their quotient of larger gentlemen. Sure enough, this debut album is a smoking gun if ever there was one.

Terror Squad are a six-piece Hispanic crew from the Bronx. Joe and Pun are already well established by virtue of blinding solo albums - which, with a seemingly effortless and flowing ability to weave compelling stories, rudely differentiates them from the faceless legions of whiney New Yorkers. With two major talents in house, it's impressive they've found four accomplices - Cuban Link, Triple Seis, Armageddon and Prospect - who not only hold their own, but succeed with stakes so high.

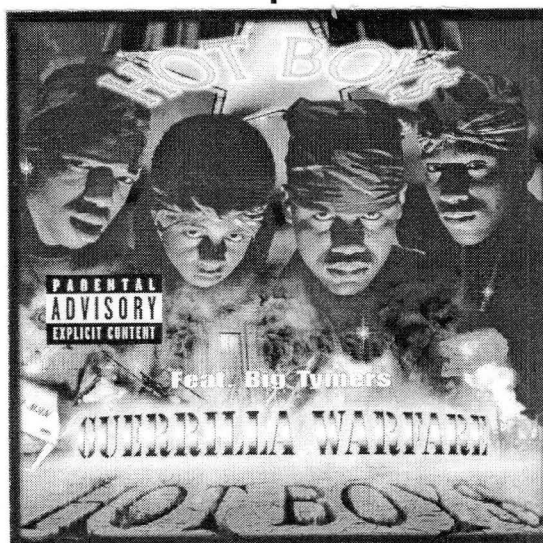
It should be stressed that TS aren't part of this Latino thing that's apparently going on - as Fat Joe has said, even though his uncle is a doctor he doesn't specialise in Spanish medicine. There may be a few Latino elements, but no more so than on many current hip hop albums. Lyrical brilliance aside, it doesn't hurt that the music is so damn trouser-soilingly fine. There's a certain Wu-Tang rawness, but without the haphazard quality which tips that group's music into directionless chaos. The production is better, sounding lavish and orchestrated without sacrificing its hard-edged energy. Imagine the RZA producing a Burt Bacharach score to *Goodfellas*.

I've seen a few mediocre reviews of this album, which prompts the old 'were they listening to the same album' question beloved of *Melody Maker* readers. I've tried, but I can't find a single dud, just 16 absolute horrorcore belters. Most notable are the Buju Banton collaboration 'Rudeboy Salute', so weird that it works - and Triple Seis' solo track 'War', which beggars description. It's one of those once in a lifetime, all bets are off, numbers. I've never visited the Bronx but listening to Terror Squad, I think I even know what the place SMELLS like. This set really sticks it in, and breaks it off. It just HAS to be the finest debut in a good few years. Pun and Joe might shop at clothing stores for the larger gent, but there isn't an ounce of flab on this disc.



Epitaph for Big Pun

Since writing the above it has been announced that Big Pun



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died of a heart attack on the 7th of February. That he passed away from causes which were medical rather than, as is more common, gang related, is of little comfort. Again, we've lost one of the good guys. Anyone familiar with the above album, or his solo debut *Capital Punishment*, or his numerous appearances elsewhere, will know that he was never just another Bronx rapper. Few have achieved such levels of widespread respect or shown such original lyrical genius so early on in their career. As of the time of writing, I'm still finding it hard to accept that he's gone. He was one of the greats. He will be missed.



Puff Daddy Forever

USA, BAD BOY
78612-73033-2 CD (1999)

Puffy's come in for a lot of criticism, from sources who aren't perhaps overqualified for the task. The legend runs that Puffy can't dance, write, play an instrument, or rap. Some of this is true, as Puffy has freely admitted. His talent, which is sometimes overlooked, is in production - in knowing which elements to bring together to make a whole. He excels so well in this field as to compensate for other shortcomings. There was that Police sample of course, when many people seemed to forget that hip hop started off by nicking bits of other people's tunes. With 'I'll Be Missing You', he produced a record I love, out of one that I wouldn't wipe my arse with - which must indicate something special. Even if he can't rap, he's certainly pulled the wool over my eyes - he's more interesting to listen to than many rappers whose credentials never come into question. Over this and the previous album there's only one moment where he falls on his arse, verbally. On 'Can't Nobody Hold Me Down', he's busily borrowing Flash's 'The Message', but when it comes to the punctuating 'hu-hu hu hu', he fails to make the jump - and he's suddenly back in the teenager's bedroom, trying not to anger Puff Mommy with loud recording sessions. That's the only instance.

As a producer he may not be as groundbreaking as Timbaland or Dr Dre, but he can make a drum machine on its own sound as lavish as Roxy Music at their most cocktail-swiggingly luxuriant. 'Underproduced' or 'half-finished' are descriptions you'll never apply to this boy's work. The best tracks here - 'I

Hear Voices', 'Gangsta Shit', 'Pain', 'Reverse', 'Best Friend', 'What You Want' and 'I'll Do This For You' might tote the occasional firearm, but still sound like they're casually propped up against the concert grand, tie undone, with dancing fountains in the background - and yes, I AM saying that's a good thing. The pick of the bunch are 'PE 2000' - which Chuck D allowed his diametric opposite to borrow in the name of irony - and the token Notorious B.I.G. number, which shifts over most of *Born Again*. But - with such a rich production sound, there's a fine balance between being lavish and turning into Barry Manilow. Perhaps aware of this, Puffy goes in the other direction and goes all fancy-pants avant-garde on us. Well, sort of. The tracks in question are musically adventurous, but ultimately a bit forgettable. Maybe it isn't really his field, maybe the ideas get lost in a production that isn't suited. 'Is This The End' sounds like he's trying to do Timbaland, but it just doesn't work. He wants to watch this gangsta stuff, because it's not a subject he does convincingly. If your hot dogs are good, leave the kebabs to someone else.

It isn't all great, and doesn't stand up to *No Way Out*, but if you liked that album there's more than enough here to justify buying this one. The main problem, symptomised by Puffy's increasingly eccentric behaviour and this slightly schizophrenic album, is that the loss of Biggie left him a little ungrounded. The demise of such a close friend must be more traumatic than might seem apparent, even at the time. Hopefully he'll get himself sorted, because, when on top form he can be forgiven for being Donald Trump's mate. It seems rare that someone so stinking rich has their heart in the right place, which he undoubtedly does.



Tru Da Crime Family

USA, NO LIMIT V2 47558 2 X CD (1999)

For those of you who weren't paying attention last issue, Tru are the three Miller brothers, Master P, C-Murder, and Silk. The Shocker, joined by a guest list longer than your arm including (in addition to the No Limit regulars) Full Blooded, DIG, and Ghetto Commission. It starts off in fine form with a sort of Elgar-in-a-good-mood fanfare, over which P explains that you're alone in thinking the tank has lost its fire, and your friends, mom,

dad, uncles, aunts, grandparents, brothers and sister - with whom he enjoyed sexual congress only the other day - will concur with him.

My only misgiving is that there's a bit too much of what follows. Two discs, although they aren't full length, so the whole set



clocks in at just over an hour and a half. There isn't so much variety as I've come to expect from No Limit releases, and many tracks do the 'ballin' soul' thing that Master P perfected on earlier scorches such as 'Bourbons and Lacs' and 'Smokin' Green'. This is fine, but makes the collection sound one-dimensional in comparison to Master P's *Ghetto D*, for example, which spans musical divides with the enthusiasm of an eight-armed clown in a pie fight. There's a couple of numbers which, I feel certain, could have benefited from some additional tweaking in the final mix, just to bring out all the stuff going on in the background a bit more.

Such ruminations perhaps explain the unfavourable notices that have been made against the label. There's a good few choice cuts here: the horror film electronica of 'Hoody Hoo'; the dirty grinding beats of 'Dangerous In My City'; the sample-scatterburst of 'Miller Boys'; the brooding downtempo menace of 'Hard N's'; and the killer synth-pop if 'I Don't Want You No More', with its irresistible burping 303 bass accompanying Silk sounding every inch the teen heart-throb he's renowned to have become. I've previously remained undecided about Silk. The Shocker's microphone technique. On a bad day he might be a Tourette's sufferer having an argument with himself while, by pure coincidence, hip hop music is going on somewhere else at

the same time. However, on *Da Crime Family*, he really takes flight. His favoured method of cramming syllables around lengthy mid-sentence pauses, while inventive, sometimes falls on its arse. But not today. Silk, my little son, now I understand what you're trying to do.

Da Crime Family could've been a killer single album, but has ended up a reasonable double with some high points. Although there's a generous helping of diamonds, it isn't one of No Limits most heavily encrusted. Even so it still dumps over most of the competition. This is after all a No Limit release, and there'll be a heatwave on Pluto before the tank fires blanks.

The High & Mighty Home Field Advantage

USA, RAWKUS P2 50121 CD (1999)

As some pundits predicted, the phenomenal popularity of Eminem has inadvertently given rise to a whole wave of watery white rappers trying to pass off their pasty pop as the real stuff. There was the truly morbid Bran Van 2000, who dared to pinch lines from Snoop for their weedy booze advert soundtrack. There's Len who ride high in the pop parade with the sonic equivalent of Jamie 'Tank Girl' Hewlett's terminally cutesie comic strips. Worse still were 1,000 Clowns featuring a man with the most punchable face I've seen in a long time, bleating 'I know I'm not the greatest rapper in the world', Got that one right, pal! Bah. These opportunist butt-monkeys should be left in a locked room with the mighty Mystikal. A few lines from the Tasmanian Devil of

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New Orleans hip hop and it'd be just like one those films of trees caught in a nuclear blast, leaves and bark stripped away in a fraction of a second.

Mr Eon and Mighty Mi are two more white guys in the game, but thankfully this pair, collectively The High & Mighty, are the real thing. Rawkus is accruing quite a bit of attention for albums by Pharoahe Monch and Mos Def, so let's hope *Home Field Advantage* doesn't get overlooked amid all the excitement. The cover photo of a teenager's bedroom festooned with basketball souvenirs, baseball trading cards, and posters of Public Enemy and Eric B and Rakim, hints at where they're coming from. Is this old school? I don't remember old school sounding so modern, even at the time: elegant chunky scratches from Mighty Mi over meaty acoustic beats with consistently irresistible hooks. Mr Eon comes over like your friendly Noo Yoik uncle, the Bob Dobbbs lookalike with the high-powered job, ruined by his obsession with strip shows and all-night porn cinema. It's something to do with his cheerfully lurid drawl. Is that an effluvia-encrusted mac rustling in the background? There isn't a whole lot of the drugs, gunplay, money stuff but - boy - do these guys love that top shelf! 'Dick Starbuck - Porno Detective' and 'Hands On Experience' - an ode to what we all get up to when we're alone and fall victim to the horn - are just two stories from this big city. It's Prince without the expensive hotel rooms, or a sober hip hop Bukowski without the misery. Although burping the worm or digging for clams isn't the only topic of debate, even when Mr Eon manages to get onto some other subject, that loveable hairy-palmed imp just can't help himself: 'While on this mic I be a pleasant surprise, like seeing shaven pussy right in front of your eyes.' Brother, you is speaking my language.

Naughty rotten rhymers Eminem has been turning up on everything. Rumour has it that there's a polka band in Scandinavia whose new CD doesn't feature a guest appearance by he whom men call Slim Shady, although Busta Rhymes is reputed to have been involved. Personally I think it's great that he's become so ubiquitous. Wacky genius of this calibre doesn't always achieve recognition in its own time. He's here on 'The Last Hit' offering 'if I don't got two balls and a middle finger to throw up, I'm taking off both shoes and sticking each middle toe up'. Eminem plays

Daffy Duck with firearms to Mr Eon's 18 certificate Homer Simpson. On the subject of guests, for your buck you also get Mos Def, Pharoahe Monch, Mad Skillz and that other celebrated porn enthusiast Kool Keith imparting more of his 'I am an alien' japery.

Home Field Advantage bounces along on bassy beats and lurid detail like an early Disney cartoon redrafted by graf artists and the editorial staff of *Reader's Wives*. Imagine 'Steam Boat Willie' with the emphasis on the last part of the title. Listening to it on a Walkman whilst pounding the streets in my day job, I just about stopped myself throwing hand shapes and loosening the

Kass CD and Raekwon's guest spot with Cocoa Brovaz. You'd probably have to be a bit more hardcore than I am (which isn't particularly hardcore) to have all of these tracks already, particularly as two of the sixteen are previously unreleased.

It took me a while to grow accustomed to the Wu-Tang Clan. Initially they sounded a bit too half-assed, with noises and lines dropping in and out of the muddy mix seemingly at random, while unremarkable geezers rapped vaguely in the same room - even in time with the beats on odd occasions. Now I see the error of my ways. It is this raw and dirty-edged quality that is their strength, and the individual



belt for embaggied trousers, but it was impossible to keep a silly grin away from my face. Picture me asking bewildered pensioners to sign dockets while in the headphones Mr Eon bares his soul with 'Channel 35 receiver, dick reliever, spank to the thought of me shaving beavers'. Damn, this is funky, and in more than just the musical sense of the word. It smells, but it smells good. If you know what I'm saying. Hubba-Hubba! Go, baby, go!



Various Artists Wu-Chronicles

USA, WU-TANG RECORDS
P2 51143 CD (1999)

Not really a proper Clan album as such, although most of the group's core players are here, but a compilation of bits from other people's records. Method Man's collaboration with Notorious B.I.G. is loaned from the late lamented portly one's first album. Also we get the RZA's appearance on the Ras

members deliver some fine and unique performances, once you make the effort to listen. The best Wu-Tang tracks lurch drunkenly along on a relentless RZA beat with the kinetic energy of a motorway pile-up. You can almost smell gasoline and oil clogging up the CD player as each track staggers towards you, arguing with itself, dropping a bottle of malt gutrot, smashing on the pavement. RZA's production makes Steve Albini's sound positively clean-shaven, and I'd love to know what he gets up to in the studio. It sounds like he's using gas-powered SKI samplers, but I'll bet it's a good deal more complicated than that. His grubby ink-stained soundtracks hold the same textural allure as a grainy photograph reproduced on a broken photocopier: was that an orchestra or the screech of tyres on tarmac?

Inevitably this doesn't top *Enter the Wu-Tang*, and not all of the tracks are great, but it still has enough to merit a rummage in your wallet. The opening track in particular, GZA's '4th Chamber',

is prime Wu-Tang, with a nails-down-blackboard synth screeching over spaghetti Western guitar and RZA's tenth-generation xerox distorted beats. Killarmy's 'Wake Up' does the same thing to something that's been kidnapped from Barry Manilow and taken down under the flyover with a bag over its head. Drop the vocals from Mobb Deep's 'Right Back At You' and you'd have a Swans outtake from the *Greed* sessions. Drop the vocals from 'Semi-Automatic: Full Rap Metal Jacket' and you'd almost have Cabaret Voltaire from the days when they were still fiddling about with radios. And course there's 'The End' from Ras Kass' *Rassassination* - an album which you should already own, I rather think you'll find.

Nice cover art too, and a friend who's into martial arts tells me the Chinese characters do mean something appropriate, not just 'fried rice' or 'crispy duck' as I'd suspected. With their chaotic solo careers, and Ol' Dirty Bastard being arrested on a daily basis, it's anyone's guess when this lot will ever get around to doing another Clan album proper, but in the meantime this fills the gap.



Company Flow Funcrusher Plus

USA, RAWKUS RWK 1134-2
CD (1997)

I was blown away by 'Patriotism' on the *Soundbombing II* compilation, not least because of the eloquent and unforgiving lyrical barrage: 'I'm the ugliest version of passed down toxic capitalist rabid MC perversion - I'm America!' I kept my nostrils peeled for more. *Little Johnny From The Hospital* is a beast of epic proportions, but the only version I've found is entirely instrumental. I'd almost given up when providence alerted me to the existence of this album, and I vividly remember standing in HMV, stunned and excited by the prospect of a whole CD's worth of Company Flow, complete with raps.

Funcrusher Plus had some seriously high expectations to live up to and although not quite getting there straight off, it comes through in the end. The production is pretty rough. The music is hard-edged and minimal. *Little Johnny*, with its many discomforting layers, has a rich velvet texture, but this is quite a different can of invertebrates. Mark Stewart strapped to a

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welder's bench for improvised surgery by the RZA, if you will. Although stark and out of focus and not what you'd call easy listening, it mutates into something compelling with repeated plays. That isn't to say it's a case of 'if I listen to this long enough I'm sure to like it eventually', but it's an album which can't be spun a few times and then filed away. Similarly, with the best will in the world, even if you succeed in hammering a 12" vinyl record into your CD player, the chances are that the sound quality won't be up to much. Different format, you see. Aside from the unmerry melodies, there's a phenomenal volume of lyrical work which can't possibly be digested in one or two sittings without the aid of a genetically engineered brain. One line boasts 'future MCs are sending robots back in time as we speak to kill my mother before I'm born', and listening to the gob Olympics going on, this may not be just a load of words that sound cool. Big Juss and El Productor (look, NME readers, a white rapper...with ginger hair!) seem to be two in a field of two, in terms of their lyrical persuasions. To be honest, I still have only vague ideas what many of these tracks are about, beyond a faint suspicion that Company Flow aren't particularly enamoured of big corporations, authority, or stupidity. I'd guess Public Enemy could be an influence, at least more so than Puff Daddy. I mean - 'even when I say nothing it's a beautiful use of negative space' - what a line! Without wishing to cast aspersions on anyone else, it just isn't the sort of thing I've become accustomed to hearing on a hip-hop record.

Taken as a whole, in spite of an occasionally witty maxim emerging from the sensory overload, it's quite a chilling record. Even the cheesy pulp film dialogue of 'Help Wanted' ('My name is Lute. My Planet is Pluto. My business is architecture.') comes over like the awful portent of some

totalitarian future. Initially, only two tracks stand out as being overtly musical: 'Krazy Kings' which chugs along nervously until a spiralling horn-driven chorus pulls the rug out from under you; and 'Info Kill II' which is Elgar slashing his wrists with a beatbox in an outtake from *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

Massive Attack might as well be Steps. These two seem to represent the portion of iceberg above the surface. Even if the true scale of *Funcrusher Plus* isn't apparent at first glance, it still has the power to put a crimp in your agenda. Buy this album and brace yourself. It may not be a comfortable ride but you'll get

used to it, and after a little time you'll be glad to have made the effort.



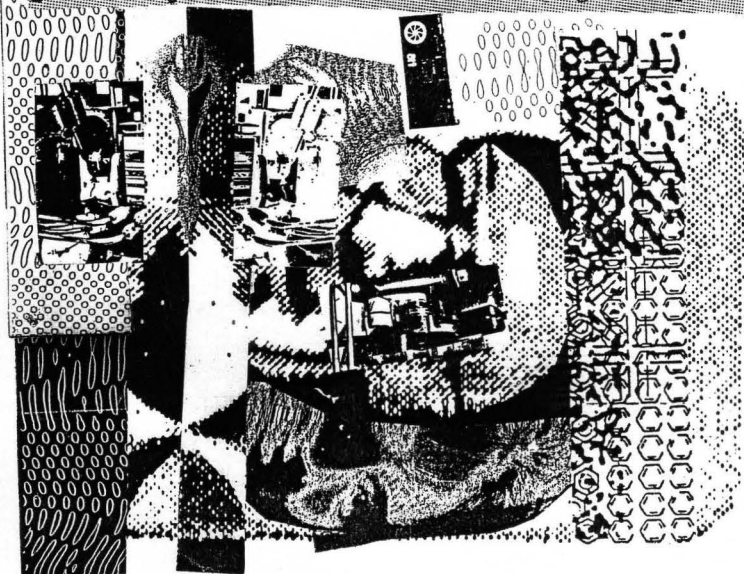
basic primitive



starting from there



Homemade hybrid electronic circuits un-intentionally generating interference and backfeeding sounds.



random the roots

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